THE SANDINISTAN REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

Political Science

BY

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ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
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1990

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This is to certify that **Mr. Kausar Jamil Hilaly** is a bonafide research student in the Department of Political Science, A.M.U., Aligarh. He has written a dissertation entitled **"The Sandinistan Revolution in Nicaragua"** under my supervision and guidance. This work is original and I believe it is suitable for the award of M.Phil. degree.

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PREFACE

A land bridge between North and South America and a narrow isthmus separating the Atlantic from the Pacific Ocean, Central America Has been at economic and cultural crossroads and a battleground for foreign powers throughout its history. The line of volcanoes dotting its Pacific mountain chains and periodic earthquakes seem to mirror the unsettled nature of the land. In fact, the enduring allure of the region derives from its unique geographical position. Spain, later France and Britain, and finally the United States have all come to appreciate its strategic importance for both North and South America. However, military intervention and political interference by these nations in this area over the years has made anti-imperialism a rallying point for revolutionary movements. Nicaragua is an excellent case in point.

Ever since William Walker's invasion in 1885, this country has seen repeated American attempts at influencing its politics. Starting off with the first direct military intervention in 1909, US military presence has remained here in varying degrees. The justifications put forward for intervention have also varied: from the need to help the Liberals in their fight against the Conservatives and vice versa, to the need to contain communism, and, finally, to the need to prop up a pro-American,corrupt and brutal Somoza regime. And in this, Nicaraguan national interests and aspirations have been ridden roughshod over.

The effect of this on Nicaragua has been telling. Although

there was, in general, a recognition of the fact that US presence was unwarranted and undesirable for Nicaragua, it was left to a nationalist, August Cesar Sandino, and his small band of followers to go about educating the masses and enlisting their support for a movement aimed at physically driving the Americans and the Somozas out of the country. Sandino also gave shape to a philosophy reconciling major tenets of Christianity with his own brand of socialism in an attempt to mobilise the people. Dismissed as a rabble-rouser and an opportunist, Sandino's efforts were however rudely cut short by his death at the hands of Somoza thugs in 1934.

The Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN), an organisation founded by Carlos Fonseca, Tomas Borge and Silvio Mayorga in July 1961 to fight Somoza and his cronies, began to reinterpret Sandino's original struggle in the light of historic and ideological developments following his death. Under them, it is said, the rebellious Nicaraguan spirit recovered much of its brilliance. Taking advantage of the people's revolutionary initiatives, the support of a hitherto apolitical Church and the new-found hostility of the Press towards the Somozas, the FSLN was finally able to overthrow the Somoza dynasty in July 1979 after a bloody struggle.

In Nicaragua, anti-Americanism has often, during and after the struggle, translated itself into pro-Sovietism. While Cuba, too, played an important role in galvanising support for the revolutionaries, the influence of Marx and Engels' teachings on the Sandinistas helped them to identify themselves with the socialist bloc. Not surprisingly therefore, Nicaragua was soon to become one of the newest areas of superpower confrontation.

A modest attempt has been made in this dissertation to examine the factors that went into the making of the 1979 revolution. It seeks to establish a direct relationship between US hegemonic ambitions and the growth of Nicaraguan nationalist sentiment which finally culminated in victory for the FSLN.

Chapter I is primarily an introduction to Nicaragua's geography and strategic location. Also discussed in it are the country's early history, economy and political development.

In Chapter II, Sandino's eclectic philosophy and its impact on the subsequent revolutionary process has been explained. Besides, the role played by two major actors, the Nicaraguan Church and the Press, in ushering in the Revolution has been discussed.

Chapter III is a sequential narration of events leading to the ultimate ouster of Anastasio Somoza Debayle the last of the Somozas, from power and the triumphant march to Managua by the Sandinistas.

US policy towards Nicaragua over the years has been discussed in Chapter IV with special emphasis on the policy in the years immediately preceding the 1979 revolution. This chapter also deals with Soviet interests and involvement in the country, the constraints faced, and the successes achieved by it.

The concluding chapter is an attempt at analysing the reasons behind the failure of the Sandinista Front government to consolidate its position after coming to power. The growth of the Contra movement and the victory of the

Violeta Chamorro-led Union of National Opposition (UNO) coalition party in the February, 1990 elections have also been examined in this chapter, to make the dissertation up-to-date.

I would like to place on record my heartfelt gratitude and deep appreciation of the tremendous help and encouragement given to me, despite various pressures on him, by my Supervisor, Dr. B.Rahamathulla, Reader, Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, in writing this dissertation.

I am thankful to the Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, A.M.U., Aligarh, for providing me with a small grant to buy much-needed stationery.

Thanks are also due to the concerned authorities at various libraries, viz., The Seminar Library, Department of Political Science, A.M.U., Aligarh, the Maulana Azad Library, A.M.U., Aligarh, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi, the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi, the British Council Library, New Delhi, and the American Center Library, New Delhi, for cooperating with and helping me in the collection of material.

I am beholden to my parents for not letting me down during the last two years or so that it took me to write this, and to Sarah for bearing the expenses incurred.

I would also like to mention the names of Dr. M.A.Kishore, Dr. M.Abid, my friends, Nadeem, Jawaid, Sajjad and Tariq for their encouragement and support, the latter four particularly for helping me keep awake nights on end.

Thanks are also due to Dr. A.P. Sharma, Chairman, Department of Political Science for his guidance and encouragement.

I am indebted to Shalja, Nivedita and Reshma for giving me not only the courage but also enough treats to see me through the slog hours. I am particularly thankful to Bonnie, for the genuine concern and interest she has always shown, for having lent me an extraordinary big hand in all matters pertaining to writing this dissertation, and most importantly, for having been overwhelmingly generous with her time and comments.

Lastly, I am grateful to Mr. Mashhood Alam Raz for correcting certain spellings and also for doing an absolutely fantastic job with the typewriter.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The name Nicaragua,[1] which has cropped up ever so frequently in the realm of international politics over the past decade, conjures, up in the mind of the average reader, the image of a strife-torn and ravaged nation for apparent reasons. Flanked by a hostile Honduras on the north and a not-too-friendly Costa Rica on the south, this largest Central American state has been playing unwilling and unintending host to a proxy "civil war" fought by the two super powers; a war which threatens to tear asunder its social, political and economic fabric.

While to some, the 1979 revolution in the country and events following it are a symbol of the determination of a people to successfully resist the designs of an imperialist power seeking to establish hegemony, to others, it bears ominous portents of a communist resurrection and entry into the Latin American mainland. However, an objective approach would probably incline one towards the view that it is no more and no less than an extension of the cold war to South America.

A correct picture of the situation in Nicaragua would, however, be difficult to draw and understand without any reference to its strategic importance. Primarily an agricultural nation involved in the plantation of cotton,

1 The word Nicaragua is derived from the name of a native, tribal Indian Chief Nicarao, who lived in this region when the Spaniards conquered it in the early 1500s.

sugar, coffee and banana, Nicaragua is a distant cry from the resource-laden colony prospect that generally attracts colonial powers. But this factor has been relegated to the background in favour of more weighty political considerations, even as the Big Two and their surrogates continue their endeavours to gain a foothold in the country through both covert and overt means.

Long considered one of the most stable and durable of North America's clientele states in the region under the firm domination of Somoza family rule, Nicaragua has seemingly become the epicentre of violent revolutionary change throughout Central America. Apart from the fact that the Sandinistan revolution inspired insurrectionary activity in neighbouring countries by example, it has provided a safe base for revolutionary organisations in the region to prepare or direct other insurrections. In reality, however, the social, political and economic forces that helped precipitate the Nicaraguan revolution, together with the particular array of political actors and behavioural propensities within Nicaraguan society that facilitated the initiation of mass insurrectionary activity are, in many respects, unique to Nicaragua.[2] This is, however, not to suggest that Nicaragua before the revolution had very little in common with the rest of the Central American republics. On the contrary, the country shared literacy and health problems, endemic structural unemployment, lack of infrastructural facilities, skewed income distribution and legacy of political turmoil with most of the other Central American nations.

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2 Stephen M.Gorman, 'Social Change and Political Revolution', in Steve, C.Ropp and James A. Morris (edited), Central America : Crisis and Adaptation, (University of New Mexico Press, 1985), p.33.

GENERAL GEOGRAPHY

The pattern of settlement in Nicaragua is the first factor which distinguishes it from the rest of Central America.[3] While like its neighbours, the vast majority of the Nicaraguan population lives on the Pacific side of the mountain chain that runs down the middle of the Central American isthmus, the principal population centres are located at much lower elevations and therefore have a more tropical, less desirable climate than is true for most of the region's other major urban centres. Geographically, the country is divided begween a large, underdeveloped Atlantic or Caribbean region and a considerably more developed but smaller Pacific region. A chain of mountains averaging 610 metres in elevation running about 400 kms from the south-eastern frontier with Costa Rica separates the two areas. Yet another range of mountains runs in the north-easterly direction along the remainder of the border with Honduras.

Nicaragua's Pacific region consists essentially of a low-lying basin containing two large, island-dotted lakes. A narrow range of volcanic mountains separates this basin from the Pacific. A majority of the population has settled within the confines of this semi-tropical basin or on the highlands of surrounding mountains. In recent times, however, a lot of settlements have sprung up in the region in and around Managua, the capital city, located generally, between lakes Managua and Nicaragua. The population of this western region of Nicaragua is almost

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3 Nicaragua is the least densely populated Central American nation; with 2,373,000 people for its 50,000 sq. miles, giving it a density of 43 persons per sq. mile (Figures are for 1975).

uniformly Mestizo, and therefore relatively homogenous, although a very small minority may be considered blancos, or white.[4] The Caribbean region of Nicaragua, on the other hand, presents a kaledioscope of ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities which together constitute something between 5 and 10 per cent of the national population. Most notable among these minorities are the Miskitu Indians[5] and English-speaking descendants of African slaves.

Inhabitants of this Caribbean region have seldom, almost never, contributed to the political and economic life of the country. In fact, throughout Nicaragua's history, the area has remained virtually isolated from the national mainstream. The distance and cold relations, bordering on hostility, between the peoples of eastern and western Nicaragua can only partially be explained in terms of ethnic, racial, linguistic and of course, geographical differences. One must take into account also the fact that these two regions have had totally divergent historical experiences. As Philippe Bourgois, who has studied the life and culture of Nicaragua's native Indians, explains:

> "The profound cultural antagonism between the Pacific and Atlantic provinces of Nicaragua arose out of their distinct historical experiences, and social formations. It has its roots in the diametrically opposed trajectories of Spanish and British Colonialism in the region"[6]

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4 Mestizos are persons of mixed Spanish and Indian blood found almost all over Latin America.

5 Miskitu Indians are the inhabitants of the virtually inaccessible Mosquito Coast which runs some 200 miles along the northern part of the Caribbean coast.

6 Philippe Bourgois, 'The Problematic of Nicaragua's Indigenous Minorities', in T. Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution (New York:Praeger Publishers, 1982), p.306.

The Atlantic provinces' tradition of resistance to Spanish Colonialism, starting from the 16th century and which benefited from British assistance, has carried over into modern times in which the minorities have consistently defied the authority of subsequent Nicaraguan governments.

The political development of Nicaragua has been influenced largely by its geography. The existence of a natural pass through the chain of mountains that cuts across the length of Central America and the close proximity of two large, low-level lakes, has, since time immemorial, made Nicaragua an ideal location for a trans-isthmian canal. Recognition of this fact led to early British and North American political penetration of the country, much earlier and more direct, than in the rest of the region. This development, as was found later, had umpteen ramifications for the subsequent evolution of political attitudes and orientations among certain groups of the Nicaraguan population. Anti-imperialism became an inherent part of Nicaraguan thought as an inevitable corollary to concrete historical events. Mention must also be made of the fact that though Nicaragua charted a course of political and especially economic development similar in outline to the rest of Central America, it lagged somewhat behind its counterparts in many other respects, particularly during the years following its independence in 1821. The aforementioned facts can be best illustrated by a brief revision of Nicaragua's early history.

EARLY HISTORY AND POLITICS

In pre-Hispanic times, the area that is now Nicaragua, was inhabited by a variety of Indian tribes. With the

advent of Europeans in 1522, in the shape of a Spanish expedition from Panama led by Gil Gonzalez de Avita (1470-1528), followed by another Spanish expedition led by Francisco de Cordoba (1475-1525) in 1524, much of this population either died out or was assimilated by the conquerors.[7] In fact, according to a 1548 Spanish census, only 11,000 Indians were left from a population estimated between 5,00,000 and 7,50,000.[8] In 1570, these pioneer settlements were joined to the Spanish colony of Guatemala. In the 1600s, English sea-raiders attacked both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts of Nicaragua and managed to establish their influence over the Indians of the Mosquito Coast. The Mosquito Coast was declared a British protectorate in 1687 and it remained so until the 1780s.

The three centuries of colonial rule, particularly by the Spanish, left deep scars on Nicaraguan thought, economy and polity. Having destroyed the local labour force, the Spanish inexplicably lost interest in the area. The colonisers who remained, had to restore some Indian rights, including limited self-government and communal landholdings called ejidos, and a system based on large ranches and grain-growing estates surrounded by satellite Indian hamlets engaged in subsistence agriculture developed. The Indians paid tribute from their crops besides providing workers for the estates. This basic pattern prevailed until the start of large scale coffee production for export in the mid-nineteenth century. The great landowners

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7 World Book Encyclopaedia, N-O, vol. 13, (Chicago: 1960), p. 316.

8 Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin (edited), Central American Crisis Reader, (Summit Books, 1987), p. 38.

extended their holdings at the expense of the ejidos and peasant plots. Those who lost their land became dependent upon the large estates or had to migrate to the cities.

The Spanish conquerors thus left for the Indians a legacy of a semi-feudal economic system based on exploitation and the corresponding attribute in the political system, viz., authoritarianism. These patterns, have persisted from generation to generation into our day, reinforced by the Church and the educational system with wealth, education and political power continuing to be shared unequally between the descendants of the conquerors and those of the conquered.

When independence from Spanish rule came in 1821, Central America was under the loose administrative authority of Mexico City. The region became independent as the United Provinces of Central America with its capital in Guatemala in 1823; Nicaragua being one of its five constituent units. Since its inception, however, the confederation was beset with internal bickering, the axis of political competition being between the liberals, with their anticlericalism and desire for a federalist system, and conservatives, who favoured state support of church privileges and a strong Central government. The titles of these two political parties, which have subsequently come to play a major role in the politics of most Central American nations, however, should not be taken in the modern sense. With clericalism ceasing to be a major issue in the twentieth century, the two parties simply came to represent rival factions within the landed oligarchy.[9]

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9 Thomas P. Anderson, Politics in Central America, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), p.150.

Nicaragua's role in the political life of the newly-established United Provinces of Central America was very minimal. One questionable explanation that has been offered was that Nicaraguan population's calibre was lower when compared to other provinces.' "During colonial days this region attracted fewer energetic Spaniards than the settlements on the salubrious highlands of Guatemala and Costa Rica."[10] An increase in factional political violence saw a corresponding deterioration in the unity of Central America after 1827 and by 1838, the United Provinces dissolved and each of the member provinces became independent republics. The isthmus became a region of what some have called city-states: small countries weak and vulnerable to outside forces, and with reduced possibility for economic growth and diversification.

Political independence brought with it no accompanying social or economic revolution. The new Central American republics, Nicaragua included, retained important characteristics established in the colonial era:[11]

i) Economies based on plantation agriculture.

ii) A concentration of large land-holdings in a few hands.

iii) Societies lacking vigorous middle classes and dominated by the landowning elites.

iv) Poor communications within the region and relative isolation from the outide world.

v) Habits of authoritarian government.

vi) Ingrained reliance on centralised state jurisdiction and tolerance of corruption.

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10 Hubert Herring, A History of Latin America, (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1968), p.488.

11 Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, (Washington, D.C. : 1984), p.18.

Politically, the five nations called themselves republics and adopted constitutions modelled in many respects on the American Constitution of 1787 and on the liberal Spanish Constitution of 1812.[12] The resulting governments had presidential and electoral systems resembling those of the United States. But the substance was very different. Judicial traditions based on Roman civil law served primarily to facilitate state control than as a bulwark of individual rights. The difficulties that arose from trying to reconcile two systems, one political and the other legal, with distinctly different foundations are still apparent in Central America today.

In the meantime, however, the rivalry and competition continued unabated between the Liberals and Conservatives within the newly constituted independent republics. While this development followed a set pattern in the other Central American republics, the outcome in Nicaragua was slightly different. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Liberals were the only force to reckon with in most of the region except Nicaragua. At that time, the dominant political questions were beginning to centre around economic issues, with Liberals favouring expanded state assistance for the development of new agro-export industries.[13] Thus, as the gradual displacement of the more aristocratic and traditionalistic conservatives by the liberals began, new forces of economic development came into focus and were encouraged. In Nicaragua, on the contrary, "where the Liberals were tainted more than elsewhere" by virtue of their earlier alliance with North American expansionists, "the conservatives were able to hold on for much longer."[14]

12 Ibid.

13 Stephen M. Gorman, n.2, p.38.

14 Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., Central America:A Nation Divided, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 154-55.

The 'warfare' between the liberals and the conservatives was not generally related to differences in their philosophical approach to national issues. Rather, it was about power and the possibilities that power offered for enrichment. The two groups functioned more like tribes or armies than political parties and those who aspired to public office needed the talents of a warlord more than those of a political thinker.[15] The two parties had individual capital cities, which each considered the national capital. Leon, the second largest city was the liberal stronghold, and Granada was the conservative centre, but the warfare between them ranged all over the country. Managua was eventually selected as the centre of government in the hope that it might prove a neutral site. In large measure, it was this inability to resolve conservative-liberal disputes peacefully that brought foreign intervention, either by governments or adventurers. In general it cannot be said that the United States Government found either the liberals or the conservatives more to its liking. Like the Nicaraguans themselves, it tended to find the personalities more compelling.[16]

The period between 1863 and 1893 saw a consolidation of conservative sway led by Tom Martinez over Nicaragua and to them goes the credit -- the same role being played by their liberal counterparts in other countries -- of promoting the production of coffee, which was fast becoming a major cash crop for the rest of the region.

This status quo did not remain for long. In 1893, the conservatives were dramatically ousted from power by a

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15 Shirley Christian, Nicaragua - Revolution in the Family, (New York :Random House, 1986), p.5.

16 Ibid.

liberal revolt led by Jose Santos Zelaya and yet again, Nicaragua found itself developing in a direction diffent from the regional pattern. Liberalism under Zelaya was characterised by a virulent anti-imperialism and in it lay the seeds of the subsequent evolution of Nicaraguan nationalism. Initially, however, Zelaya too, like the conservatives, gave preferential treatment to US interests, but when Washington decided to take over the construction of the transoceanic canal in Panama, rather than build it across Nicaragua, he turned his back on the US and opened negotiations with France on a loan to finance the construction of a railway line. In 1909, when he decided to liquidate Nicaragua's public debt, Zelaya ignored the New York banks and to the great chagrin of American financial circles, turned to the London-based financial group, the Ethelburg Syndicate. However, the main reason for the displeasure of the US Secretary of State were the obstacles raised by the Nicaraguan Government to prevent the plunder of the country's mineral and forest resources by the American Fletcher Corporation, of which the Secretary of State, Philander Knox, was a major shareholder.[17] The US lost no time whatsoever in engineering the liberals' overthrow and a restoration of the more acceptable conservative rule. Subsequently the US maintained a military presence in Nicaragua for 19 of the 21 years between 1912 and 1933, both to ensure collection of debts owed to New York bankers and to defend conservatives against the armed conspiracies of the liberals.[18]

A significant development during the 1920s in Nicaraguan

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17 Angelo Colleoni, U.S. Interventions - A Brief History, (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1984), p.101.

18 T.W. Walker, Nicaragua : The Land of Sandino, (Colorado: West View Press, 1981), pp. 20-23.

politics was the neutralisation and virtual disappearance of ideological and philosophical differences between the liberal and conservative parties, and in the factional strife that flared in 1925, partisan ambition was the dominant motivation. Thus, since the liberal party had discarded its extreme nationalism and anti-imperialism which it had acquired under Zelaya, the US found little difficulty in installing a liberal President in 1928, managing to do so without sacrificing even the least security or its interests in the country. The nationalistic, anti-imperialistic tradition was championed thereafter by movements outside the legal political system, beginning with the rebellion of Augusto Cesar Sandino in 1927, and culminating with the revolution of the Sandinista Front of National Liberation in 1979.[19]

Extended conservative rule, delayed economic development, and direct foreign intervention strongly influenced the country's political revolution. In so far as the political system is concerned, the Nicaraguan experience may be considered as falling somewhere between the experiences of Costa Rica and Guatemala. Costa Rica witnessed intense political competition between the Liberal and Conservative parties early on in its history but by the beginning of the 20th century, the Costa Rican polity had come up with a more or less agreed-upon democratic framework to regulate that competition. In Guatemala, on the other hand, political parties came to play second fiddle to political caudillos, who ruled the country by sheer force of their personalities. Thus, in comparison to Costa Rica's political democracy predicated on party competition, and Guatemala's authoritarian

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19 Harry Vanden, 'The Ideology of Insurrection', in T.W.Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1989), p.27.

tradition that rendered political parties irrelevant early in its hitory, Nicaragua, presents a mixture of both patterns.[20]

For more than a century, till the 1920s, Nicaraguan polity was in a constant state of flux. Much of the turbulence of the period was generated by friction between the liberals and the conservatives, as each endeavoured to acquire control over the state. In fact, the achievement of political stability in the country appeared a rather difficult proposition in the 1930s. The first signs of political stability, however, came with the establishment of the US-assisted Somoza dictatorship in 1936. The setting up of a National Guard, trained and equipped by the US under Somoza's control, was aimed at further reinforcing this stability. Although a dictator, Somoza, chose to rule Nicaragua disguised as a democratically chosen leader, and to that end he converted the liberal party into a vehicle for fulfilling his personal ambitions. At the same time, he continued to encourage the existence of the conservative party as a token opposition, mainly to silence his critics.

The task of carrying on this masquerade of "democracy" was admirably managed by one or the other of the Somoza family over the next forty years while placing ultimate reliance on a military apparatus which, significantly, never achieved the slightest degree of institutional autonomy and therefore was incapable of becoming an independent political actor."[21] The consolidation of the Somocista dictatorship signified not only a closure of the

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20 Stephen M. Gorman, n.2, p.40.

21 Ibid., p.41.

road to democracy based on open-party competition, but also a reduction in the probability of institutionalised military rule. Ultimately, the prevailing political-economic order that arose under the Somozas could be preserved neither by the "election" of a figurehead opposition leader, nor the imposition of a military junta.[22] The penetration of the political system and the national military by the Somozas was so complete that the destruction of the one became well-nigh impossible without a corresponding and simultaneous destruction of the prevailing political system and the national military. Hence, change, once it came, was as a revolution.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE REVOLUTION

The revolution that humbled the Somozas has been viewed as a deliberate, "popularly supported attempt to restructure the political and economic relations that took shape over an extended period of dependent capitalist development in Nicaragua".[23] By dependent capitalist development is meant economic activity in developing countries, which (1) treats labour as a commodity and relies on the state to keep the price of that commodity artificially low; (2) is oriented towards external markets with which close financial and political ties are maintained, and (3) is largely engaged in either the production of primary products desired by developed market economies or value-added industrialisation in which the primary economic resource is extremely cheap labour.[24]

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p.42.

24 Ronald Chilcote and Joel Edelstein, Latin America: The Struggle with Dependency and Beyond, (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1974).

It has been argued that the very nature of Nicaragua's economic development and the specific characteristics of the political system that came into existence to promote and protect that development eventually produced a level of lower class mobilisation and politicisation that led to political decay. That is not to suggest that revolution was inevitable, only that it became more likely as the society became increasingly complex and the dictatorship became increasingly inflexible. The techniques of social control that paved the way for the establishment of the Somoza dynasty in the 1930s became counter-productive as the society became more complex and differentiated. The evolution of modern society and economic relationships required the institutionalisation of new capacities on the part of political authorities. But the foundations of Nicaraguan economic development, the exploitation of cheap labour as the basis of efficient agro-export contributed to political intrasigence on the part of the dictatorship. As a result, the regime lost legitimacy and grew more isolated. The inability or unwillingness of the traditional political parties to push effectively for any meaningful political change or economic reforms in turn provided an opening to more revolutionary solutions to the growing political crisis.[25]

The Sandinista Front of National Liberation (Fronte Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional - FSLN) that became the political and military vanguard of national liberation of Nicaragua successfully preopted other political groups in the revolutionary process. It did this by correctly identifying and utilising certain political undercurrents produced by the country's dependent capitalist development.

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25 Stephen M. Gorman, n.2, p.66.

Specifically, the FSLN stressed the nationalistic, anti-imperialistic nature of the struggle against the US-backed dictatorship. The theme of populism -- which was completely ignored by the traditional political parties -- also proved to be an important basis of appeal.[26] Finally, the FSLN's call for a united front against the dictatorship during the final stage of the insurrection allowed most of the upper classes -- who had been unable to devise a viable solution to the political crisis on their own -- to abandon the dictatorship in favour of a popular government of national unity dominated by the Sandinista Front. There is, however, need for the assessment as regards the characterisation of the armed struggle. As Alfred Stephen says: "To classify it as a civil war would be misleading, because no social or geographical groups independently organised themselves to defend the regime."[27] Rather, the struggle against a long-entrenched despot closely identified with a foreign power made the struggle against Somoza not so much a class war as a war of national liberation. "In this war of national liberation, the Catholic church as a corporate institution and even business groups acting under the occasional direction of the Chamber of Commerce, protested against the regime".[28] The Sandinistas did, of course, play a crucial role in galvanising resentment into insurrection -- the special role of the vanguard.

It is now generally recognised that actions on the part of the masses were determinant in the outcome of the struggle.

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26 Stephen M. Gorman, 'The Role of Revolutionary Armed Forces' in T.Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1982), pp. 115-19.

27 Alfred Stephen, 'The US and Latin America : Vital Interest and the Instruments of Power', Foreign Affairs, 58(III), (New York : Pergamon Press, 1980), p.680.

28 Ibid.

As Humberto Ortega, Commander-in-Chief of the Sandinistan Peoples Army and brother of former president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, says: "I myself feel that it is very difficult to take power without a creative combination of all forces of struggle wherever they can take place: countryside, city, town, neighbourhood, mountain, etc., but always based on the idea that the mass movement is the focal point of the struggle and not the vanguard, with the masses limited to merely supporting it."[29]

These views of the relationship between mass and vanguard represent a qualitative change from the days of the conception of the guerilla foco, where the vanguard was seen as acting almost alone. At the same time, it represents a variation on the classical Leninist conception of a party of the working class and peasantry formed as a precondition for taking power. But it is a fact that party formation in Nicaragua would be seen as a task corresponding to the period of consolidation of revolutionary power rather than as an indispensable precondition for achieving it.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NICARAGUAN OPPOSITION

During the liberation war under Sandino, all the subaltern sections of Nicaraguan society, which had previously acted in isolation from one another, or under the leadership of a fraction of the bourgeoisie, emerged as a single, autonomous historical subject, acting independently of the bourgeoisie for the first time in the country's history. While a few remnants of the Sandinistas had been destroyed, the popular resistance came in the 1940s to follow in the wake

29 Marta Harnecker, 'Nicaragua : The Strategy of Victory', (Interview with FSLN Commander, Humberto Ortega), (Managua : Intercontinental Press, 1980), p.155.

of the conservative bourgeois opposition and was channelled and used by these forces.[30] Both the communist party and the trade union movement were crushed by Somoza immediately after World War II.

The first steps towards the beginning of a new autonomous labour movement were taken by the transport workers in 1950s, with the foundation of a national union.

The emancipation of the agricultural population from the tutelage of the conservative opposition began with the cotton boom of the first half of the 1950s.[31] This led to a pact between the conservative cotton bourgeoisie and Somoza, and, with the extension of cotton growing, to the proletarianization of former small peasants and evictions from the land. The victims of this process could not but take an opposition stance against its initiatives. When falling cotton and coffee prices led to an economic crisis in the second half of the 1950s, and the assassination of Tacho Somoza also brought the regime into political crisis, this emancipation led to a large number of strikes, mass struggles and the refounding of trade-unions and workers and peasants' associations. The conservatives were now unable to control and channelise this movement.[32]

From this peasants', workers' and students' movement of the late 1950s grew the first -- chiefly student -- guerrilla groups, coming together in 1961-62 to form the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN). The same movement

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30 Somoza converted the Liberal Party into his private party. The bourgeois opposition thus gathered around the conservatives. The political content of these two major traditional political tendencies, however, had long since shifted. The conservatives no more pursued a consistently conservative policy than the Somocistas a liberal one.

31 Harald Jung, 'Behind the Nicaraguan Revolution', New Left Review, 117, Sept.-Oct., 1979, p.73.

32 Ibid.

led to the reconstruction of the communist party, the Partido Socialista Nicaraguense (PSN). From the movements, too, there arose the forerunners of the three major Nicaraguan trade-union associations of today: the Confederacion General de Trabajadores (CGT), the Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua (CTN), and the Confederacion Unificacion Sindical (CUS).[33]

In the countryside, it was chiefly the Sandinistas and philanthropic Christians who organised workers into unions and gave them their political education. Monastic orders organised peasant cooperatives and in this way took over the vision of society based on cooperation which Sandino's original peasant and worker soldiers had already dreamed of.

In the cities, the same period saw the implantation of the communist party and the small left-wing Catholic Partido Social Cristiano (PSC), the Communist party later splitting into an orthodox and a "nationally independent" wing.[34] The PSC led the CTN trade-union federation, and the Communists the CGT. From 1972 onwards, these trade unions were increasingly able to stage large-scale and comprehensive strikes and mass demonstrations, making social, economic and specific political demands on the regime.

Until 1974, the political groups of the bourgeoisie followed a very disunited, vacillating and contradictory policy vis-a-vis the Somoza clan and its Mafia regime. The clan was well aware of this and alternately involved different

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33 The CGT, the largest trade-union association, belongs to the World Federation of Trade Unions, the CTN to the World Confederation of Labour, and the CUS to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

34 Harald Jung, 'Behind the Nicaraguan Revolution' in the Stanford Central America Action Network (edited), Revolution in Central America, (Colorado : West View Press, 1983), p.25.

fractions of the bourgeoisie in its criminal deals, seeking always to break up the bourgeois opposition.[35]

From 1973 onwards, political crisis came increasingly to a head. Four factors were responsible for this:[36]

1. After the devastating Managua earthquake of December 1972, the Somoza clan used the resultant international aid chiefly for its own enrichment. While victims of the earthquake were bleeding in Managua, the clan was selling the blood plasma received from international aid organisations at a good price in the United States. The people felt that the Nicaraguan Government was in actual fact nothing but a criminal syndicate.

2. With the build up of the military bourgeoisie after 1972, government corruption and economic crimes increased to such an extent that properly conducted business transactions became virtually impossible. Even the Somoza clan was no longer in a position to control the access of certain fractions of the bourgeoisie to crooked deals. The mechanism that had previously blocked the emergence of a united bourgeois opposition now increasingly began to fail.

3. To support this military bourgeoise and make repayments on government blocked foreign debts,[37] the regime steadily increased taxes on production and consumption. This ever-rising tax burden, together with a rate of inflation that had reached almost 35 per cent in 1977, and the spread of

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p.26.

37 The industrialisation of the 1960s was largely financed by government loans from abroad on account of the low level of local savings. After 1975, the government attempted to stabilise economic development in a similar way. In 1977 the publicly guaranteed foreign debt stood at 836 million dollars as against a total GNP of only 2 billion. Debt servicing cost 104 million dollars in 1977, i.e., 15.8 per cent of the total receipts from exports. Harald Jung, n. 34, p. 27.

criminal "competition" by the military bourgeoisie, brought the marginal and petty bourgeoisie in particular to the verge of economic collapse.[38]

4. A liberal policy on prices combined with restriction on wages, led from the mid-1970s to an increasing decline in real purchasing power for wage-earners, nominal wage increases failing to keep pace with inflation.

It was against this background that these small opposition groups managed, from the middle of the 70s, to secure for themselves support from those sections of the population they represented. The opposition was broadly divided into two sections, represented on the one hand by the bourgeois-dominated Union Democratica de Liberacion (UDEL), and on the other hand, by the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN).

The UDEL considered itself a collaboration of labour and capital for the overthrow of the Somoza Government, and had no programme of social transformation. "It set its sights on the establishment of a capitalism, functioning according to market mechanisms, with a democratic form of bourgeois rule, in which exchange relationships between economic subjects would obey the principles of freedom and equality, and not be over-shadowed and made impossible by corruption, blackmail and dictatorial caprice."[39] UDEL's strategy was designed to strengthen the opponents of Somoza in the USA by exposing the atrocities of his regime, and

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38 In Managua, for e.g., officers sold vast quantities of electrical goods that had been smuggled into the country free of duty and at far below their usual market price. Taxi and bus firms were monopolised by National Guard officers, and several large estates were also distributed to the officers. Harald Jung, n. 34, p.27.

39 Harald Jung, n. 34, p.27.

subsequently to force the dictator's recognition by a general strike with US backing.[40]

The FSLN initially operated on the basis of Che Guevara's theory, but by 1964 had been almost destroyed, so that it began intensive political work among students and peasants. In 1966-67, it launched a new guerrilla war, was again defeated, and subsequently came to place the major weight of its activity on political work among peasant and agricultural workers, whom it intended to organise and educate for a protracted people's war.

The tremendous growth in the number of people marginalized in urban slums and the development in the economic and political spheres since 1973, gave rise to a massive resistance potential in the cities as well. In 1975, the FSLN started discussing a new strategy in view of the above mentioned developments. It ended with the emergence of three distinct factions within the organisation.

After 1975, the leadership of the majority faction opened the FSLN to non-marxist, politically committed Christians, who worked for liberation from the Somoza regime and for a socialism based on cooperatives. It thus managed to win much needed support of important sections of the church, which since the late 1960s had turned more strongly against the regime on humanitarian grounds. At the same time, the majority faction began to construct a political as well as a military organisation in the cities, to initiate and press forward the mass organisation needed for popular insurrection.[41]

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40 UDEL, El Programa de UDEL (English Translation), Managua, 1974.

41 C. Fonseca Amador, 'Zero Hour in Nicaragua' in Tricontinental, Havana, Sept.-Oct., 1969.

The FSLN's strategy of entering into a tactical alliance with "bourgeois, opposition forces", paid dividends in so far as it resulted in the formation, in late 1978, of the Movimiento Pueblo Unido (MPU), with the adherence of more than twenty-two organisations. The MPU stood still more clearly than the FSLN for a socialist perspective on the basis of the nationalisation of all basic branches of the economy.[42]

While the UDEL was busy organising a human rights campaign against Somoza among US public opinion, the US Congress decided in 1977 to continue military support to Somoza. It was in this background that the Sandinista military organisation began attacking the National Guard while its political wing organised demonstrations and strikes.

The church and the trade unions were particularly active in supporting such actions and contributing to the formation of new popular organisations. At the same time, a group of prominent individuals from Nicaragua's economic and cultural life, the "Group of Twelve", declared that no solution was possible for the country without the participation of the FSLN, and that the entire opposition, including the Sandinistas, should combine in a common opposition front for the overthrow of the regime. High bourgeois dignitaries, members of the UDEL and sections of the church leadership sought to stir the dictator to a "national dialogue" and to reforms.

However, the killing of UDEL chairman, Pedro Joaquin

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42 MPU, Programa de MPU, Managua, July 1978 (English translation).

Chamorro in January 1978, apparently at the behest of Somoza, thwarted moves of any national dialogue. Strikes were called and very soon they began to assume the forms of a violent popular insurrection. All this signalled the culmination of what purported to be a unification of all opposition forces against the Somoza regime. The fight for the 'liberation' of Nicaragua was thus on in right earnest under the leadership of a more or less unified opposition from 1978 onwards.

Chapter II

ROLE OF IDEOLOGY, CHURCH AND PRESS IN THE REVOLUTION

The ideas that went into the making of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua did not emerge full blown in the politically charged atmosphere that generally characterised Latin America after the Cuban Revolution. Rather, these beliefs had their roots in the national past, in the history of a nation that strove to free itself from foreign domination and internal despotism. As Humberto Ortega Saavedra pointed out so aptly:

> "We could say that we did not invent the fundamental elements of our liberation ourselves. The vanguard gathered these ideas from Sandino, from our own people, and this is what enabled us to lead the people toward their liberty. We found political, military, ideological, and moral elements in our people, in our own history..."[1]

Sandinismo (the political philosophy ofAugust Cesar Sandino) became the repository of national consciousness. It represented the culmination of a long process that finally allowed the Nicaraguan people to gain an understanding of their own history. It became the ideological vehicle through which the national past was recaptured by the Nicaraguan masses.

Before the advent of Sandino and Sandinismo, Nicaraguans could not comprehend their present reality because of a lack of sense of history. A majority of the leaders of the

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1 Humberto Ortega Saavedra, La Revolucion a traves de nuestra direcion nacional (Managua:Secretaria Nacional de propaganda Educacion Politica del FSLN, 1980), p.9.

country failed to realise that the nation's development was not even remotely connected with aggrandisement of personal interest, or that cooperating with an expanding imperial presence would ultimately compromise national dignity and the nation itself.[2] Gabriel Garcia Marquez affirms, 'a consciousness of history is a necessary precondition for a society's survival and autonomous development.'[3] However, Nicaraguans gained such a consciousness only through better than fifty years of Sandinista struggle. And even during the struggle, the reactionary forces 'always denied people the knowledge of their own history.'[4]

The first traces of modern national consciousness, of which the Indian and mestizo population also formed part, emerged only towards the end of the nineteenth century in Nicaragua. This was over a generation after the pro-slavery adventurer William Walker and his band of mercenaries carried out the first in a long series of American backed intervention in national affairs.[5] It was only then that a few

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2 Harry E. Vanden, 'Ideology of the Insurrection,' in T.W. Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger, 1982), p.42.

3 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude, (New York : Avon, 1971).

4 Tomas Borge, ideologue of the FSLN, in Humberto Ortega's Fifty years of Sandinista Struggle, Ministory of Interior, Managua, 1980, p.3.

5 William Walker, an 'American soldier-of-fortune' was invited by the Liberals in 1855 to help them defeat the Conservatives. Not long after bringing them to power, however, Walker pushed the Liberal allies aside and declared himself president. Slavery was legalised and English became the official language. This bizarre turn of events not only catalysed both parties and all of the other Central American republics into a virtual holy war against 'the yankee interloper' but also so discredited the Liberals that the Conservatives were able to rule Nicaragua with little opposition for the next third of the century.

intellectuals began to look toward their distant indigenous past to rediscover their nation's historic identity and thus transcend the narrow Hispanicism that had continually constrained national politics, thought, and literature.

The Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario, demonstrated in Prosas Profumas how the most remote seeds of the struggle for national liberation and the development of a modern national consciousness resided in the indigenous struggle to resist Spanish colonisation.[6] Dario's poetic sensibility, in fact, enabled him to see the continuity of the stuggle more clearly than most Nicaraguan politicians of his day.

The modernist poets who followed Dario contributed their bit too, to the growth of a historic identity in Nicaragua and were, with Dario, the founders of Nicaraguan literature. They were affected by the sociopolitical situation of Nicaragua, and were the first to rediscover an awareness of Nicaragua's popular history. In doing so they began to disseminate the ideas that, as they found fertile ground in a people long denied an awareness of their place in history, were to contribute to the growing nationalist awareness that was to become manifest in the struggle of Sandino and his army to defend national sovereignty.

A few of Nicaragua's Liberal politicians slowly began to realise that the country's political structures were inadequate. Although the Liberal reform movement did not develop in Nicaragua until the late 19th century, it carried a vision of society similar to that of other reform movements in Mexico (under Benito Juarez) and elsewhere in Latin America.

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6 Ruben Dario, Prosas Profumas, vol.5, (Madrid : Castilla, 1953), p.763.

The interventionist policies of the United States, ranging from establishment of puppet regimes to direct intervention by US Marines tended to radicalise many supporters of the Liberal movement, and even prompted a few Conservatives to join the many armed uprisings against US-installed governments.[7] The struggle began to thus take on clear nationalist and anti-imperialist overtones. With Sandino joining the Liberals after his return from Mexico, there came about a split in its ranks over the question of acceptance of a United States arranged compromise solution regarding the Liberal-Conservative feud. While the other Liberal generals were in favour of following a rather non-confrontationist path, Sandino spoke about freeing the country by a 'force of arms.'

For the Sandinistas, Sandino's example is important but so was his political thought. The latter was crucial to understanding the Nicaraguan revolution not only because it had influenced the thinking of the past and present Sandinista leadership, but also because the leadership believed the Revolution begun with Sandino rather than with the Sandinista movement reconstituted thirty years after his death.[8]

Whatever the economic, political and sociological explanations of the revolution, the intellectual factors behind it derive from Sandino's unique blend of revolutionary ideas. Although obsessed with America's domination and repeated political and military intervention in Nicaragua

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7 The Nicaraguan people were involved in some thirty armed uprisings between 1906 and 1926. Humberto Ortega, n.1, p.10.

8 Donald C. Hodges, Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution, (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1986), p.ix.

and the rest of Central America, Sandino did more than wage a war of liberation against a foreign intruder. Whereas he was astute enough to hide his political intentions from his immediate followers until conditions might be ripe for revealing them, his long-range goal was an economic, political and cultural transformation that would have ended in revolution -- it finally did.[9]

From its inception, Sandino's struggle both inspired, as was supported by the lower classes in Nicaragua. In contrast to the bourgeois politicians, even the humble prostitutes of Puerto Cabezas[10] realised that the country needed armed mobilisation and not self-serving compromises with the forces of imperialism. Sandino and his Army to Defend National Sovereignty were forced to rely on little more than their own ingenuity and the support of Nicaragua's lower classes. This was to become a popular national struggle par excellence.[11]

Sandino brought the wisdom of his previous life experience into the struggle. While his early life in rural Nicaragua linked him to the peasants and Indians in the countryside; his labour as a mechanic and worker in a variety of foreign and domestic corporations united him with the interests of the proletariat of Latin America and the rest of the world. His stint with the US-owned Huasteca Petroleum Company in Tampico, Mexico, saw him affected by the

9 Ibid.

10 A group of prostitutes in the Atlantic Coast town of Puerto Cabezas helped Sandino and his mates recover fifty rifles that the United States Marines had confiscated from other Liberal forces.

11 Harry E. Vanden, n.2, p.44.

nationalist radicalism of the Mexican revolution and soon 'began to identify himself with a broad nationality embracing all Americans of Iberian and Indian descent'.[12]

During the period of his stay in Mexico, Sandino was an eye-witness to the struggles of militant oil-workers against their employers in Tampico. He was exposed to the nations of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), to militant anarchism, and to Marxist internationalism. From the anarchists, Sandino absorbed a strong dose of anti-authoritarianism, anticlericalism and anticapitalism; from the socialists, his advanced programme of social legislation and strategy of alliances with other progressive forces, including hoped -- for material and moral support from Mexico's revolutionary government; and from the Communists, his commitment to a worldwide proletarian revolution.[13] In Tampico, Sandino also lent a sympathetic ear to the religious currents that supported the Mexican Revolution. 'Freemasonry, Mexican Spiritualism and the Magnetic-Spiritual School of the Universal Commune's custom-made fusion of anarchism and spiritism'[14] are currents from which Sandino assimilated his brand of theosophy. Many of these ideas -- along with his ardent Nicaraguan and Latin American nationalism -- would be manifested in his later thought and writing.

Although a Nicaraguan above all, Sandino realised that Nicaragua's struggle was part of a larger movement:

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12 Neil Macaulay, The Sandino Affair, (Chicago : Quadrangle Books, 1967), p.53.

13 Donald C. Hodges, n.8, p.6.

14 Ibid., p. 24.

'At the present historical moment our struggle is national and racial; it will become international as the colonial and semi-colonial peoples unite with the peoples of the imperialistic nations'.[15] Without being a Marxist, Sandino had an internationalist vision of a revolutionary nationalism that was linked to other revolutionary movements throughout the world. "It would not be strange for me and my army to find ourselves in any country of Latin America where the murderous invader had set his sights on conquest,"[16] he said. What had begun essentially as an outgrowth of a liberal uprising was being transformed into a revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle by the most exploited classes in the country. The political work of Sandino's growing army of miners, Indians, peasants, and artisans and the increasing sophistication and tenacity of their popular guerilla war had gained the support of the Nicaraguan masses, a growing number of Latin Americans, a few informed North Americans and many Latin American intellectuals.[17] The ferocity of the conflict with the Marines made it imperative for Sandino and his followers to upgrade their military tactics and strengthen their ties with the rural masses who supported their struggle.

It would be pertinent to make reference, at this juncture, to the substance and direction of Sandino's

15 N. Macaulay, n.12, p. 113.

16 Sandino, as cited in Jose Benito Escobar, Ideario Sandinista, (Managua : Secretaria Nacional de propaganda Educacion, 1980), p.5.

17 Macaulay mentions, for instance, the support work done on Sandino's behalf by the poet Joaquin Gracia Monge (Costa Rica), Gabriela Mistral (Chile) and Jose Carlos Marcategin (Peru). N. Macaulay, n.12, p. 113.

ideology. This ideology which virtually unified the popular struggle was essentially a very flexible and non-sectarian Third World Marxism that was carefully applied to the specific conditions in Nicaragua. Although it was influenced by the tactics and ideology of other Third World nations, that also had to struggle for their liberation,[18] Sandinismo was very much Nicaraguan and was not a copy or imitation of any other nation.[19] Specific tactics and strategies of the revolution were developed in the process of struggle as revolutionary theory tempered political and military action and was at the same time changed by it.

Sandino's political assessments had as their primary focus the war in Nicaragua. Among the principal enemies of his country, he identified not only the Wall Street bankers and the United States government, but also the American people, personified by William Walker. To this list he added most of Nicaragua's political leaders, both liberal and conservative, who were seeking an accommodation with the Americans. Against these enemies of the people stood his Defending Army of National Sovereignty. Like his contemporary Mao Tse-tung, Sandino asked the same fundamental questions: 'Who are our enemies?' 'Who are our friends?' and 'Who are the people?'. If Mao had a revolutionary theory predicated on his answers, so did Sandino.

In an effort to make his views attractive to ignorant and illiterate peasants, Sandino gave them a dramatic cast. The American people were 'pirates', 'freebooters', 'blond beasts' and 'machos'. The Wall Street bankers worshipped

18 Vietnam and Cuba, for instance.

19 Harry E. Vanden, n.2, p.57.

the 'golden calf'. The White House appeared as a 'whited sepulcher', clean on the outside but rotten within. The political leaders of Nicaragua were 'traitors' and Judases who sold out their country for a few pieces of silver. In contrast, his Defending Army was presented as God's instrument for regeneration not only of Nicaragua,but also all of Central and South America. In short, he gave to his political thought an ideological coating. This has misled most students of Sandino into believing that he did not have a theory worthy of the name.[20]

A closer examination of the activating ideologies of Sandino would however disprove this claim. Whereas he might be correctly accused of not providing any original theory, Sandino should be given due credit for a very efficient assimilation of the principal revolutionary thoughts and political ideologies of the day into a more or less coherent framework. The objective was to rouse the Nicaraguan masses into standing up against the Somoza regime by putting forward a practical and emotionally appealing ideology. And in this, he met with a reasonable amount of success as subsequent events would go to show.

It is important to note that the teachings of the Magnetic-Spiritual School, drawing inspiration mainly from Joaquin Trincado's work,[21] and its political project of the

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20 Donald C. Hodges, n.8, p.22.

21 'The Five Loves'- Joaquin Trincado (1866-1935) was a Spanish electrician living in Argentina. Although educated by priests, he soon acquired a fanatical dislike for all forms of religious indoctrination. Anti-clericalism was to become, if not an obsession, the pervasive concern of his entire published work. He called for a new "communal fraternity with equal rights and duties to work and to consume, in which each produces what he can and consumes what he needs." This was to be achieved by founding agricultural and industrial cooperatives managed by the workers themselves.

establishment of a universal commune amounting to 'the whole world communised' is what influenced Sandino in the ideological formation of what he calls 'rational communism'. Sandino did not explain, however, his rather peculiar juxtaposition of 'rational' and 'communist'. What is known is that his belief in a world communist revolution was based on his theosophy, which proclaimed itself rational rather than dogmatic. A 'rational communist' to Sandino was a communist guided by Divine Reason. In the Light and Truth Manifesto, he identified the communist forecast of world revolution with the Final Judgement of the Scriptures wherein would happen the destruction of injustice on earth and the reign of the spirit of Light and Truth, i.e., Love. This final episode is divine and human history would be preceded by a world war,unleashed by the Wall Street bankers in an effort to complete the construction of an inter-oceanic canal through Nicaragua, an effort doomed to defeat because Divine Justice impelled Nicaraguans to stop them.

Although Sandino rejected faith in a personal God and denied the divinity of Christ, calling him no more than the foremost champion of liberty, he acknowledged that there were personal benefits of professing a religious faith: '... it raises the peasant's hopes and aspirations because they think of themselves as actors in an eternal and ever-renewed drama in which victory favours the just.' He was consequently not averse to encouraging religion in others. While he looked on established religion as an opiate of the masses, he believed that faith might also, given the necessary boost, become an impulse to revolution.

An examination of the letters Sandino had written would lead us to understand that he thought his theosophical

beliefs supported revolutionary actions because they dissipated the fear of death and encouraged the struggle for justice. Sandino was pragmatic enough to realise that if the revolutionaries were to be activated by a myth, this seemed better than most. To give them more confidence he put forward a doctrine of the reincarnation of the spirit and the eternal nature of life. Sandino's ideology may thus be seen to have two components. Ethically, he appealed to the values of patriotism and articulated a doctrine of human rights tied to the word sacred. Theologically, he mounted a system of beliefs predicated on a continuing war between the forces of good and evil, a final holocaust and the victory of divine justice. These non-rational sources of motivation gave a tremendous impetus to his movement by strengthening the will to sacrifice.

Having thus ensured the support of a majority of the Nicaraguans to his cause and realising that he would have to take recourse to armed struggle, Sandino began preparations for it. But not even the revolutionary government of Mexico would offer Sandino and his followers any assistance.[22] They were hence forced to become more and more self reliant and to learn how to make optimum use of their only abundant resource -- the Nicaraguan people. Rifles from the Spanish-American War, war material captured from the invaders, bombs made from the sardine cans the Marines discarded, and a sea of machetes wielded by ever more determined peasants --

22 In his pamphlet, '<u>Manifesto a los pueblos de la tierra y en particular al de Nicaragua</u>', Sandino recounts his trip to Mexico to secure material assistance for his army. He ends this Manifesto by saying that 'during the seven years of war that we have fought..., we have not received any help nor have we accumulated any political debts with any one.' (p. 24).

such were the armaments used to confront machine guns and dive bombers.[23]

This was one of the first modern examples of what a guerilla army with mass support could do against a technologically superior invader, even when the latter was supported by local quislings and the mercenary military forces at their disposal.[24] Mobile guerilla bands as the components of an egalitarian people's army, political as well as military organisation, integrated political and military actions, close ties to the peasants, and, most important, popular support and involvement -- such were the lessons to be learned from Sandino's people's war against imperialism. These lessons were not to be forgotten by the leadership of the FSLN. Said Ortega, 'In the study of Sandinism, in which our Commander Carlos Fonseca was teacher and example, we found the important elements to achieve our triumph.'[25]

Nor did others miss the importance of the nature of Sandino's struggle -- Che Guevara 'discerned the reasons for Sandino's success in resisting the Marines: the inspirational quality of his leadership and his guerrilla tactics'.[26] Colonel Alberto Bayo, the Spanish Republican guerrilla fighter who later trained Castro's original force in Mexico, was also much impressed by the military tactics Sandino's army employed.[27]

23 N.Macaulay, n.12, Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Also see Gregorio Selser, Sandino, general de hombres libres, (English Translation), (San Jose: Universitaria Centroamericana, 1979), pp. 340-41.

24 Harry E. Vanden, n.2, p.45.

25 Humberto Ortega, n.1, p.9.

26 N. Macaulay, n.12, p.262.

27 Ibid.

Tragically, although Sandino's political support had enabled him to achieve his primary objective -- the departure of all foreign troops -- he disbanded his army before he could achieve the far-reaching political and economic change he was planning at the time of his murder in 1934. His death at the hands of Somoza's National Guard signalled the beginning of a systematic slaughter of his followers and a destruction of all that he stood for. Some Sandinist columns fought on for a few more years in remote areas, but they too were eventually forced to abandon systematic armed resistance. Nonetheless, the spirit of Sandino and the example of his army lived on in the popular mind, nourished by eye witness accounts and first hand stories from Sandinist survivors.

The assasination of Somoza by a young Nicaraguan poet Rigoberto Lopez Perez in 1956 not only avenged Sandino but spurred a much-needed re-examination of national conscience that would increasingly challenge the status quo. Bringing Sandino to justice and the subsequent series of armed movements were done outside of the tutelage of the bourgeis opposition, and came to be the first attempts to reintegrate the revolutionary Sandinist movement; they represent an important step in the revolutionary war begun by Sandino.[28]

Little by little the spirit of Sandino's struggle was once again being felt across the land. A new wave of guerrilla activities broke out in the countryside; one of the more famous of these was led by Ramon Raudales, a veteran of Sandino's army.

28 Humberto Ortega Saavedra, 50 anos de Lucha Sandinista, (Managua : Ministry of Interior, 1980), p.81.

By the late 1950s, sectors of the Nicaraguan people were beginning to recover their popular history through the continuation of Sandino's struggle. But now historic conditions had changed substantially from the time of the first Sandinist struggle. Western-style bourgeois democracy was increasingly being called into question in the Third World. The ardent Mexican nationalism that had so inspired Sandino was in large part discredited among Latin American intellectuals because of the failure of subsequent Mexican regimes to implement the economic and social transformations promised by the Mexican Revolution.[29] Henceforth, Third World nationalist movements would increasingly turn to socialism and Marxism to explain their realities and nourish their revolutionary movements. Nicaragua would be no exception.

In Latin America, the development of Marxism before the advent of the Cuban Revolution did not facilitate the application of the ideology to national conditions. Moreover, the type of Marxism that was espoused by the Communist Parties in Latin America tended to be dogmatic, sectarian, and generally not well suited to Latin American conditions.[30] The development of Nicaraguan communism, with an ideology modelled after that of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, was no different. It was consequently ill-equipped to creatively fuse Marxism with the national reality of Nicaragua. Nonetheless, the Party was virtually the only institution in the country where Marxist ideas were taken seriously.

The Nicaraguan Socialist Party initially dismissed

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29 Harry E. Vanden, n.2, p.51.

30 Ibid.

Sandino as a petty-bourgeois nationalist and, like the other traditional Communist Parties in Latin America during the early 1950s and 1960s, was unwilling to engage in revolutionary activity. But the example of the Cuban Revolution led them into believing that guerrilla warfare -- as outlined by Che Guevara[31] -- was the best method of implementing political change. 'With the victory of the Cuban Revolution, the rebellious Nicaraguan spirit recovered its brilliance. The Marxism of Lenin, Fidel, Che, Ho Chi Minh was welcomed by the new revolutionary organisation -- the FSLN'.[32]

The new generation of Sandinistas thus began a movement that was the continuation of the popular struggle of August Sandino's guerrilla army. Drawing heavily on the Cuban revolutionary experience and the writings of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, they began to reinterpret Sandino's original struggle in light of historic and ideological developments following his death. Even during his guerrilla war, Sandino had concluded that the Liberal and Conservative politicians were traitors and cowards and must be replaced by worker and peasant leaders.[33] By studying their own fight for national identity and liberation in light of similar struggles in Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere, the Sandinistas were able to build on Sandino's populist notions and began to infuse their movement with a coherent ideology.

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31 Che Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare, (London : Penguin, 1969).

32 Carlos Fonseca, Sandino Proletaria, (Managua : Propaganda and Political Education Secretariat, 1980), p.6.

33 Sergio Ramirez, Analisis Historico - Social del Movimiento Sandinista, (Encuentro : Revista de la Universidad Centroamericana, 1982), p.12.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Prior to 1960, national churches in Latin America presented a uniformly traditional religious image, accompanied by sharply conservative social and political attitudes. Virtually everywhere, including Nicaragua, the church was an ally of the old order. While the Nicaraguan Catholic Church was "blind to social problems" and aligned with a government that was "hated by the people",[34] the Evangelical Church was hardly different, although it tended to be apolitical rather than openly aligned with the regime.

The first signs of change in the Nicaraguan Catholic Church appeared in the late 1960s, stimulated by the historic Latin American Bishops Conference at Medellin, Colombia, in 1968. Medellin sought to apply reforms of the second Vatican Council[35] to Latin America and it precipitated a dynamic process of reflection and experimentation within the Church.[36] An emphasis on identifying the Church with the poor led to the assumption of a more prophetic attitude towards society and politics.[37]

The prophetic attitude was expressed in a theology of liberation which interpreted the gospel as demanding that Christians be a force actively working to liberate the great majority from poverty and depression. By the mid-1970s,

34 The Catholic Church in Nicaragua, (Report of the US Catholic Press Association, 1962), p.18.

35 Convened in 1962 under Pope John XXIII.

36 Michael Dodson and T.S.Montgomery, 'The Churches in the Nicaraguan Revolution', in T.W. Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger, 1982), p.162.

37 The concept of a prophetic church is discussed at length in Michael Dodson, 'Prophetic Politics and Political Theory', Polity, XII(3), 1980, pp. 388-408.

even where theological reflection was not very sophisticated, the theology of liberation had become the common coin of discourse among progressive Catholics and Protestants. It is in this context that we must understand the transition of the Nicaraguan Catholic and Evangelical Churches from conservative defenders of the status quo to outspoken opponents of Somocismo and even to a remarkable degree, active participants in the Sandinista Revolution.

Important segments of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches in Nicaragua became revolutionary in the years between 1972 and 1979 by virtue of coming to identify the Christian liberation of their people with the armed struggle led by the FSLN. Although weak in resources, the Nicaraguan Churches at the base were so strong that they were able to withstand regime and hierarchy pressure and to participate actively in a popular political struggle. The role of the Church in Nicaragua can be explained in terms of four themes:[38]

1. The emergence of a prophetic point of view following Vatican II and Medellin coincided in Nicaragua with the deepending of anti-Somoza sentiment throughout the country, especially after the 1972 earthquake. During this devastation and after, Managua was utterly dependent on relief supplies coming in from outside the country. The Church was an important mediator of the relief effort, much of which came from international church agencies. This rapproachment between the Church and the Somoza regime lasted only a few weeks, until Somoza forced all relief supplies to be processed through the offices of his own Liberal Party. This

38 Michael Dodson and T.S. Montgomery, n.36, p.163.

overtly political manipulation of humanitarian aid almost immediately alienated the Church. The radicalisation of the Church coincided with the growing strength and popular acceptance of the FSLN.

2. While some of its key leaders were Marxist, the FSLN was not, on the whole, anti-religious. Indeed, it accepted, even encouraged, Christian participation in the revolution.

3. In many areas in Nicaragua the Churches came to be the only source of refuge for people facing repression. By providing refuge, the churches came under attack themselves and so became a focal point of popular resistance. Following the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in January 1978, the Churches became crucial sources of refuge for participants, including combatants in the armed struggle, and an important tactical resource for the FSLN, especially in the poorest areas of such cities as Masaya, Leon, Esteli and Managua, where repression was the heaviest.

4. The Catholic Church hierarchy became anti-Somocista, or at least was perceived that way by the people, even though it never became pro-Sandinista. By playing the role of mediator between the FSLN and Somoza in such crises as the taking of the Palace in August 1978, the Church gained credibility with the FSLN. So, in the insurrection, the weight of the institutional Church was perceived in the popular imagination as anti-regime. Meanwhile, much of the Evangelical leadership within the country openly embraced the FSLN as the legitimate representative of the Nicaraguan people.

The activities of the churches consequent upon the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, which included

making bombs, accumulating supplies and teaching of first aid courses by clergymen, were accompanied by exceedingly painful reflections on the meaning of religious principles and teachings. They were forced to ask, as one participant put it, "What do we do to live our faith?"[39] The prospect was frightening indeed, particularly in light of the violence it portended. Yet there was also a sense of a clear spiritual call to face this reality. They confronted "an enormous paradox of God's presence amidst terrible evil."[40] The experience brought the Christian community together in a powerful way. The centrality of prayer in their daily life was dramatically heightened. In September 1978, when the general uprising began, Christians throughout Nicaragua had accepted the need for revolution in the country. When the final insurrection began the following May, they were prepared to fight or to assist the combatants until victory.

It is pertinent to note that the Nicaraguan Churches played a key-role in providing the FSLN with a justifying set of myths. To salvage Sandino's ideology and adapt it to the people's Catholicism, the FSLN had to get rid of its theosophical content. It incorporated the ethical left overs into its cult of 'the new man' and doctrine of human rights. At the same time, a Christian version of the new man based on a reinterpretation of the moral values of Christianity developed alongside the FSLN's version and partly coalesced with it. In addition, a movement to reinterpret Christian faith in the light of the revolutionary

39 Ibid.

40 Interview of Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo of Managua by Peggy Dillon, (Managua : July 29, 1980).

process gave rise to a liberation theology, seeking to fulfil the void left by Sandino's now obsolete philosophy.

While earlier on as well, there was a recognition of the fact that "the historic experience of the past decades shows that the present revolutionary or social myths may deepen human awareness in the same way as did the religious myths of antiquity," it was left to Father Ernesto Cardenal, a Catholic priest who went on to become Nicaragua's minister of Culture after the 1979 revolution, to work on a reconciliation between Christian principles and Marxism.

Although Ernesto Cardenal's theology is far from representative of liberation theology in Nicaragua, it is closest to representing the political and ideological views of the FSLN. It is one of the few theologies of liberation to give a religious significance to the new Marxism and its extreme communist orientation makes it the only living substitute for Sandino's Communist theosophy.

Father Cardenal has made two significant contributions to the ideology of the Nicaraguan Revolution: first, the development of a unique theology of liberation whose key to the Scriptures was humanity's collective rather than personal existence; second, the adaptation of this theology to the Marxist class struggle. Together, they provide a religious justification of the Nicaraguan Revolution for those Sandinistas who are both Christians and Marxists.[41]

Among the distinguishing features of liberation theology

41 Donald C. Hodges, n.8, p.143,

is a critical reflection based on the Gospel in response to the struggle for liberation by the oppressed and exploited peoples of Latin America.[42] At the same time it is a form of action, "a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be a process through which the world is transformed."[43] "Besides actual struggles of liberation, the new theology is a response to the thinking of Latin American revolutionaries, a response to the new Marxism that began with Marietegui and was later revived by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.[44]

Another feature of liberation theology was the recovery of the original revolutionary beliefs of Christianity. Unlike the traditional and reform currents in Roman Catholicism, liberation theology spoke with the voice of the poor and oppressed, who were raised to the status of God's Chosen People. Salvation was projected on to the screen of history, and thus ceased to be other worldly or metaphysical. It focussed not on the personal longing for eternal life but the collective longing for a new society without exploitation.[45]

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS

The revolutionary war in Nicaragua was in part a war of words with major battlefields on the front pages of the newspapers and television screens both in Nicaragua and in the United States. Throughout the upsurge, Anastasio Somoza maintained firm control of the military apparatus, but his

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42 Gustavo Guitirrez, A Theology of Liberation, (New York : Orbis, 1973), p.IX.

43 Ibid., p.15.

44 Ibid., pp. 90-91.

45 Donald C. Hodges, n.8, p.275.

inability to win complete control of the channels of communication despite the use of strong-arm tactics was pivotal in his downfall. Clearly the revolution was the product of a nexus of events and conditions, including the bloodshed, hardship, and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguan people. "But without the constant assault of the opposition press and the failure of the government propaganda machine, the Somoza family might still be in power today".[46]

For a better understanding of the function of the media in the Nicaraguan revolution, two of its important characteristics should be explained:

1. As in most other Latin American nations, Nicaragua offers a classic case of collaborative journalism in which journalism was used by political combatants to further their causes. The Nicaraguan media were closely allied with political factions before the Revolution and continued to be allied with significant political, economic and religious groups after the FSLN victory in 1979.

2. Latin American media are better described as class media than mass media.[47] The Nicaraguan example was hardly different. In Nicaragua, where the per-capita number of news-paper copies, radio receivers and television sets has been among the lowest in the Americas, and the majority of the population was illiterate until 1980, the pre-revolutionary

46 John Spicer Nicholas, 'News Media in the Nicaragua Revolution', in T.W. Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger, 1982), p.81.

47 This is because most Latin Americans, owing largely to widespread illiteracy and scarce economic resources, are unable to use much more than a transistor radio.

media played a significant role only for the privileged classes.[48] And to the extent that the opposition press did affect the broader base of Nicaraguan people, it was not so much for its content, but rather as a political symbol. The latter phenomenon continued to be an important element in post-Somoza Nicaragua.

The nation's first newspaper, El Telegrafo Nicaraguense, was founded in 1835 by the president of the country, Jose Zepada, mostly as a political tool rather than a means of dissemination of news. In the following century and a half, most newspapers were founded to expouse the cause of a local Caudillo (leader), economic or other special interest groups, or, most often, one of Nicaragua's two major parties -- the Liberals or the Conservatives. Similarly, the first radio system in Nicaragua was founded in 1931 for purposive ends. Because Sandino's army frequently destroyed telegraph and telephone lines and disrupted military communications, US marines occupying the country at the time responded by building the 'Radio Nacional' network. The heritage of military control of broadcasting affected the ownership and regulation of radio,[49] and subsequently, television throughout the Somoza family rule, and continued to affect policy under Sandinista rule. Television was founded in 1955 as a commercial enterprise of the Somoza family and its allies.[50]

This tradition of colloborative media especially applied to the major figure in the history of Nicaraguan journalism, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal. In 1930, Chamorro's father bought the newspaper La Prensa, a forum

48 John Spicer Nichols, n. 46, p.182.
49 Nicaragua's most widely used medium.
50 John Spicer Nichols, n. 46, p.183.

for the Conservative platform and eventually an international symbol of opposition to the Somoza's and the Liberal Party's dominance of Nicaragua. The younger Chamorro, who had established his credentials as a political militant with an anti-Somoza bias, became publisher of La Prensa following the death of his father in 1952.

While the Somozas did not invent censorship and other forms of repression of the press in Nicaragua, they were probably more zealous and consistent in their application. Long stretches of censorship were common in Nicaragua from 1936 to 1961, including during the politically violent year of 1954. In the subsequent years, censorship often was so strict that the newspapers were not allowed to publish the fact that they were being censored.

La Prensa's editor developed a novel means of communicating with its readership in this background. Everytime the censors deleted an article from La Prensa, the editors would replace it with a photograph of Hollywood star Ava Gardner; photographs which were to soon become a widely recognised symbol of Somoza repression.[51] According to Pablo Cuadra,[52] the Ava Gardner pictures greatly increased both La Prensa's circulation and citizen opposition to the Somoza rule.

Government control of the mass media became more subtle as the Nicaraguan presidency descended the Somoza family tree. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Somozas relied less on formal censorship and other forms of overt repression and more on methods such as hoarding news print, withholding

51 Ibid., pp. 184-85.

52 Pablo Antonio Cuadra was a popular Nicaraguan poet, a long time associate of Chamorro and the post-revolutionary editor of La Prensa.

advertising, levying heavy taxes on machinery and repair parts for the opposition press, and cutting off special privileges to cooperative reporters. Yet the most effective control was ownership of the media. An overwhelming majority of the nation's radio and television stations was either owned directly by the Somoza family or its cronies, or controlled by the National Guard. Likewise, the Somozas invested heavily in the country's sparse print media, including outright ownership of the Managua daily Novedades. Under the weight of the combination of controls, virtually all of the opposition press collapsed, with one important exception -- La Prensa.

La Prensa's dogged opposition, that eventually made Chamorro not only a regional cause celebre among press organisations and human rights groups but also a popular lecturer and interview subject in the USA forced Somoza to restore formal censorship in 1974. But this restoration only raised Chamorro's international image and further tarnished Somoza's. Amnesty International, the Organisation of American States, the Carter administration in the United States and other groups brought heavy pressure on Somoza to end censorship as part of a package to end human rights violations in Nicaragua. Somoza relented in 1977, which opened the door for some of Chamorro's most acid criticism.[53]

Somoza was trapped in a hopelessly downward spiral. Each time he punished Chamorro for his polemics, he also boosted Chamorro's reputation abroad and eroded his government's support from its most important patron-United States. Each action or inaction by Somoza inevitably

53 Ibid., p.186.

required that he would have to take harsher action against Chamorro in the future. In the end, it was Chamorro who had earned the greatest credibility in the US. For that reason, the assassination of Chamorro in January 1978 produced a wave of international protest against the Somoza dynasty and contributed to the government's downfall.

Indeed, many Nicaraguan and foreign analysts argue that Chamorro's assassination was the spark that touched off the fires of the revolution.[54] Regardless of the exact effect of his assassination, Chamorro and his newspaper, after almost three decades of opposition, became national symbols for all of the ideologically diverse enemies of Somoza.

In retrospect, it may be said that throughout their rule, the Somoza family showed great adeptness at repressing opposition among the peasant and working class and coopting potential opponents in the middle classes with large-scale corruption, and by persuading the latter group of the communist or anti-business threat of the former. The Somoza family's greed during the reconstruction following the 1972 earthquake destroyed the financial advantage of middleclass cooperation with the regime, and La Prensa's increasingly sympathetic coverage of the guerrilla forces helped to alleviate the suspicion of the newspaper's largely middle and upper-class readers and thus paved the way to a revolutionary alliance.[55] Also, the negative publicity via La Prensa fanned unrest within the National Guard, Somoza's traditional power base, and encouraged the opposition in the belief that their actions might not bring American intervention after all.

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54 Thomas P.Anderson, Politics in Central America (New York: Praeger, 1982), p.157.

55 John Spicer Nicholas, n.46, p.186.

Chapter III

INSURRECTION : BEGINNING AND END OF SOMOZAS

The social impact of the forty or more years of Somoza rule in Nicaragua was profound and generally negative. Though a large and entangled social service bureaucracy was created in the early 1960s in order to take advantage of opportunities provided by the Alliance for Progress, few benefits 'trickled down' to the masses. The new programmes served largely as a way of providing employment and opportunities for the personal enrichment for the Somoza elite and its middle-class allies. Meanwhile, the economic policies of the regime were causing very real hardship for the common citizen. As the international demand for additional products such as cotton grew, 'new' lands were opened to the monied elite. As in the days of the 'coffee boom' almost a century before, individual peasants once again were driven from the land, particularly from the Pacific lowlands. This process of rural dislocation contributed in turn to an accelerated rate of urbanisation, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately, by this time, the social service bureaucracy, which might have helped ease the suffering of the rural-urban migrants, was so helplessly corrupt and inept that the problems of the poor were, in fact largely neglected.[1]

The disintegration and collapse of the Somoza system began in the early 1970s under Anastasio Somoza Debayle. During this period, Nicaraguans of all classes became

1 T.W. Walker, Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1982), p.17.

increasingly alienated by the intemperate dictator's growing greed and brutality. Two major events accelerated the process of popular disaffection. The first was the 'Christmas' earthquake of 1972, which destroyed most of the capital city, Managua. In the wake of this disaster, Somoza and his accomplices used their control of the government to funnel international relief funds into their own pockets.[2] Very little was done for the disaster victims and, until the Sandinista victory, most of Managua remained an unreconstructed moonscape. Two years after the quake, when the FSLN pulled off a very successful hostage-ransom operation, Somoza again showed an intemperate reaction. Humiliated and enraged by the FSLN's success, the dictator declared a state of siege, instituted full censorship of the press and launched the Guard on a campaign of terror in rural areas where FSLN guerillas were believed to be operating. Hundreds of peasants were raped, tortured and (or) murdered outright, many others were taken away, never to be heard from again.[3]

The FSLN hostage-ransom operation referred to incidents related to the Christmas time farewell party organised for the American ambassador Turner Shelton by a wealthy businessman Jose Castillo Quant on 27 December, 1974; a party to which all potentates of the Somoza dynasty were also called.

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2 During their long domination of Nicaragua, the Somozas accrued massive holdings in virtually every sector of the economy. By 1956, when Anastasio Somoza Garcia was killed, the family was worth $ 50 million. By the time Anastasio Jr. was 'elected' a decade later, the fortune was tripled to $ 150 million. At the time of the 1972 earthquake, it was commonly estimated at $ 300 m. And when Somoza was overthrown, he was believed to have been worth well in excess of half a million dollars. T.W.Walker, n.1, p.19.

3 The Republic of Nicaragua : An Amnesty Report, (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1977), p.31.

Shortly after the guest of honour departed, the Sandinistas, under Eduardo Contreras Escobar, rushed in and seized 40 of the guests, including the mayor of Managua and the ambassador to the United States. These persons were then held as hostages until the Sandinistas, through the mediation of the archbishop, received $ 5 million, 15 political prisoners, and a flight to Havana. The Managua raid was followed by steppedup activity by the FSLN throughout the remote provinces, especially in Zelaya, using techniques learned in Cuba to win the peasantry.[4]

In November 1976, the FSLN was dealt two stunning blows. While Eduardo Escobar was killed in November in a Managua shootout with Guardia, FSLN Secretary General Carlos Fonseca Amador and his Mexican lieutenant Julio Tirado Lopez, were ambushed and killed by the Guardia the very next day. This led to the influential publication Latin America to declare the Sandinistas 'virtually eliminated' as a threat.[5] The Sandinistas continued to make occasional forays throughout 1977, but these were viewed as nothing but 'a tiny hit and run campaign designed to attract international publicity.[6] It was also declared that the FSLN ceased to be a threat to Somoza.

A problem that confronted the FSLN at this stage was its internal strife. In 1975, a quarrel developed between those who favoured a long drawn guerrilla war and those who favoured a sudden, mass insurrection.[7] A group led by

4 Thomas P.Anderson, Politics in Central America, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1982), p.156.

5 Latin America, 26 November, 1976.

6 Penny Lernox, 'The Somozas of Nicaragua', The Nation, 23 July, 1978, pp. 72-77.

7 The former was called the Guerra Prolongada Popular (GPP) and the latter, the Proletarian tendency.

Victor Manuel Tirado Lopez, and the brothers Daniel and Humberto Ortega tried to mediate between the other two tendencies and ended up by forming their own, appropriately called the terceristas, which had the reputation of being more moderate than the others and of being linked to the progressive business community in Managua.[8]

With the FSLN in disarray, Somoza's fortunes appeared to have revived. Early in January, he reshuffled his cabinet to make it more effective. But on the 10th of the same month, his henchman committed an act of folly that went a long way towards bringing the Somoza house down. It involved Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the son of parents from two of the most powerful of old conservative families. As the publisher of the respected newspaper, La Prensa, he was a perpetual thorn in the sole of the government. Several times in the past, Chamorro had engaged in armed insurrection against the Somozas, but each time he had been pardoned and allowed to return to Managua. The Somozas, however, hated him, and none with more vehemence than Tachito, the heir apparent. The immediate cause of the anger was a series of La Prensa articles about Plasmaferesis, the Somoza-owned commercial blood plasma operation through which Somoza sold the blood of his people to the US. Several cars filled with Guardia surrounded the vehicle of Chamorro as he drove along a street in the rubble strewn old centre of Managua. They forced him to the curb and shot him point blank.[9]

While Somoza tried to pin the blame on Pedro Ramos, president of Plasmaferesis, Nicaraguans suspected a more

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8 Latin America Political Report, 29 December, 1978.

9 Thomas P. Anderson, n.4, p.157.

direct Somoza connection with the killing. Thirty thousand people joined Chamorro's funeral procession and widespread rioting broke out. Various factions, each representing a particular interest, now combined for a general strike under the leadership of the Union Democratica de Liberacion (UDEL).[10] The purpose of the strike was to force Somoza's resignation which was also called for by Rene Sandino Aguelo, the then head of the Conservative Party.[11] The general strike, after considerable violence and Government repression, petered out in the first week of February 1978, but the forces it had unleashed continued to work.

The murder of Chamorro and the subsequent general strike served to revive the morale of the Sandinistas, who launched in July a series of attacks against the Guardia in Jinotepe, then in Masaya and San Marcos. Heavy fighting was also reported along the Costa Rican border, the chief route of FSLN infiltration into the country. On 20 July came the most brazen attack, when a lone Sandinista checked into an Intercontinental Hotel room facing La Loma, and fired two rockets toward the newly completed bunker that Somoza had dug into the fortress. Angered by the ineffectiveness of the National Guard, Somoza sacked 35 officers, including Alesio Guiterrez, the chief of the Managua police department.

But more was to come. On 22nd August, 25 Sandinistas disguised as Guardia members seized the National Palace,

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10 These included the Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada (COSEP) representing business and manufacturing interests, and the confederation General de Trabajo Independiente (CGTI) and the Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua (CTN), two powerful unions.

11 Thomas P. Anderson, n.4, p.157.

where the legislature was in session and rounded up 70 hostages including Interior Minister Jose Antonio Mora and Luis Pallais. The leader of the guerrillas, Eden Pastora, then negotiated through archibishop Obando, the release of more than 60 political prisoners and a ransom of half a million dollars. After 48 hours of tense negotiations, the guerrillas, the released prisoners, and the money, along with Luis Pallais and Somoza's nephew Jose Somoza Abrego were flown to Panama. It was a master stroke, crippling the prestige of the Somozas. Even more important, one of the released prisoners was the implacable Tomas Borge Martinez, who had been imprisoned and tortured for over a year, in an effort to turn him into a 'human vegetable'. He became the nemesis of the Somoza family and the driving force in the effort of his GPP tendency, the prolonged-popular-war faction of the FSLN.[12] In the wake of these events, there was an attempted coup by some officers of the Guardia, 35 of whom were arrested.

In September, President Carter's troubleshooter William Jordan, visited the country and conducted talks with Somoza and with the new united opposition, the FAO.[13] Alfonso Robelo, a leader of COSEP and organiser of the general strike of January and February, was considered the spokesman of the FAO. Jordan tried to arrive at some compromise between the FAO and Somoza, but failed, for the FAO insisted that

12 Ibid., pp.158. Also see, for a history of the insurrection, Ricardo Chavarria, 'The Insurrection', in T.W.Walker, (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1982), pp. 41-68.

13 This opposition had coalesced, after the general strike, into the FAO (Frento Amplico de Oposicion), composed of 16 organisations, including three labour unions, four factions of the Conservative party, two socialist parties, the independent liberal party Los Doce (or the Twelve), and a new political party, the ADN.

Somoza must go and that the Guardia must be disbanded, along with the puppet Congress. In November, William Bowdler of the State Department, came down on a similar mission, along with officials from Guatemala and Dominican Republic, but again there was no compromise between the demands of the opposition and the determination of Somoza to finish the term.[14]

While the talks were on, civil war began in earnest. On 10 September, the Sandinistas temporarily abandoned hit-and-run warfare and seized the northern city of Esteli. The Guardia, with superior firepower, reduced the city to rubble in retaking it by the end of the month. But heavy fighting also broke out in Leon, where only the 'cuartel' remained in government hands until a relief force drove out the Sandinistas. Masaya was, like Esteli, destroyed in a bitter siege. In addition to combat, there was a series of specific and general strikes, beginning in August, that effectively crippled the economy.[15]

Soon however, a power struggle emerged within the opposition, with Alfonso Robelo on the one hand and Adolfo Calero Porto Carrero, the head of Coca Cola Bottling and a Somoza in-law, who had just been released from prison, on the other. Calero, who expected favour from the United States in becoming the next president, suggested a plebiscite to help determine the will of the Nicaraguan people. With the possibility of an FAO compromise becoming apparent, two factions of the front withdrew support. Somoza took advantage

14 Somoza had vowed to stay on until 1981, when he would, in his own words, 'hand over the Presidency to the Republic and the leadership of the Guardia and go home like any other liberal'. Richard Millet, Guardians of Dynasty, (New York : Orbis, 1977), p.63.

15 Thomas P. Anderson, n.4, p.159.

of these cracks within the opposition by announcing that he would go along with the FAO demands for an end of censorship, an amnesty for political prisoners, and an end of the state of siege.[16] While the Calero faction hailed this, Robelo and some others refused to consider this as any real victory. Henceforth, the FAO began to be left behind as more radical coalitions were formed. Washington still appeared to pin its hopes on the FAO and urged Somoza to go ahead with the plebiscite plan proposed by Calero but in January, the dictator suddenly made a volte face, categorically rejected the plan, and announced his intention to increase the size of the Guardia.

To replace the moribund FAO, some 20 political and union groups formed the Movimiento Pueblo Union (MPU), which subsequently became the Frente Patriotico Nacional (FPN) with links to the FSLN. Around the same time, in March 1979, FSLN founder Tomas Borge announced in Havana that the three major factions had settled their differences and were creating what was called a National Directorate, consisting of nine members.[17]

In the midst of all this confusion of parties and coalitions, the US appeared unable to develop a coherent policy. While in June 1978 President Carter went about praising Somoza's latest human rights record, in fall, he saw to it that the IMF held up a loan of $ 65.7 million that Somoza desperately needed, in an effort to get him agree to the plebiscite proposal.[18] With the rejection of

16 Ibid.

17 Havana Radio distributed the announcement of the unified directorate at the end of March with a statement by Borge acknowledging the past internal differences.

18 Thomas P. Anderson, n.4, p.160.

this idea on 15 January, the United States in early February, cut off all aid, though much that was in the pipeline continued to get through.

Surprisingly enough, the IMF finally delivered half of the loan money in June -- just in time for Somoza to take it into exile. The US ambassador Mauricio Solaun, a Cuban-born scholar who was not a professional diplomat, was confused by the political situation, disturbed by the violence and forced to carry out an unrealistic policy.[19] He left in March, with Frank Tucker taking over charge. Not until June 7 did the dynamic Lawrence Pezzulo arrive to assume the ambassadorship. Further, despite whatever signals were being sent by the US Executive Branch, Somoza had powerful friends in the Congress, including John Murphy, a West Point class mate.[20] Delegations of conservative Congressmen from the US continued to make fact-finding tours of the embattled country, and to find that 'Somoza was our only hope against a Communist takeover.'[21]

In April 1979, the GPA tendency launched an offensive in the Esteli region but were driven out. The main centre of fighting then shifted southward to Leon, Chinandega and the Costa Rican border, where the Sandinistas, enjoying both overt and covert support of the governments of Costa Rica and Panama, operated with impunity. The FSLN announced the start of a final offensive on 20 May, and captured Jinotega the same day, but yet again the firepower of the Guardia proved to be too great and they were driven out.

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19 Ibid.

20 For Murphy's role in seeking to prevent Somoza's downfall, See Shirley Christian, Nicaragua - Revolution in the Family, (New York : Random House, 1985), pp. 102-03.

21 Thomas P. Anderson, n.4, p.160.

A similar operation took place at Masaya, southeast of Managua with the same result. In fact, from the time of the Esteli attack until the end of June there were almost continual fighting in a number of large and small towns of the north and west. 'They were taken, retaken, abandoned by both sides until several were a mass of ruins, weak and ripe to fall.'[22]

Somoza retreated to his bunker and prepared for an all out war. Alfonso Robelo and several other leaders of both the FAO and the MPU were thrown into prison. Right-wing death squads on the Guatemalan pattern operated freely, and, in a particularly brutal incident, Conservative leader Alfonso Gonzalez, and his son and nephew, both 12 years old were gunned down at their Managua home by the Guardia, along with the household servants. His wife Constancia fled to the Mexican Embassy. The televised murder of ABC newsman William Stewart in June also hurt Somoza's cause.[23]

Although the Sandinistas lost most of their battles, they were in fact winning the war. The brutality of the government was forcing many who, like Robelo, had once vowed never to cooperate with them, into their camp. Help from abroad was coming not only from Costa Rica and Panama, but also from the Andean Pact countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Ecaudor, and Bolivia, as well as from Mexico.[24] Somoza did, of course, enjoy the backing of the southerncone dictatorships and of his fellow Central American conservative regimes, but this backing was not very substantial. With the arrival of Ambassador Pezzulo, even the United States appeared to have turned against him.

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22 Shirley Christian, n.20, p.110.

23 Thomas P. Anderson, no.4, p.161.

24 Shirley Christian, n.20, pp. 101-11.

Early in June, the Sandinistas began to infiltrate into Managua, and on the 8th they launched their offensive in the capital, seizing barrios both east and west of the central zone. Although the Government was taken by surprise, Somoza ordered a counter-attack; tanks and armoured cars turned their guns upon the city, along with artillery, planes bombed and strafed, and even helicopters were loaded with 500 pound bombs which were rolled out of the doors into houses and factories below.[25] The Guardia managed to regain control of the western barrios in a week, but the eastern sections of Managua remained in the hands of the Sandinistas until 27 June, when they conducted an orderly retreat under cover of darkness, some 12 miles to Masaya, which then became their headquarters.

The retreat to Masaya had been in fact only a tactical withdrawal. From there, the Sandinistas fanned out to surround the capital, pinning the Guardia against Lake Managua. The encirclement was completed with the fall of Jinotepe, on July 5. The only way in or out of the capital then was by Las Mercedes Airport, some six miles east of the city. The Sandinistas could have taken it at will, but they allowed it to remain in Government hands, perhaps as a means of escape for Somoza and his cronies so that another assault and pitched battle might be avoided.[26] Fighting continued to rage in other areas of the country near the Costa Rican border with the Guardia under the redoubtable Maj.Jose Emilio Salazar, while Esteli was still being contested in the northwest.[27]

25 Thomas P. Anderson, n.4, p.161.

26 Ibid., p.162.

27 Maj.Salazar, who was Somoza's star combat leader, led journalists to the region and showed off captured rifles, rockets, machine-guns and thousands of rounds of ammunition. He claimed that it was first victory the Guardia had ever won in conventional warfare. Shirley Christian, n.20, p.114.

Smelling victory, the Sandinista directorate named a government in exile, consisting of a five-member junta. Two members of the junta were non-marxists: Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of the martyred Pedro Joaquin, but the other three were drawn from the Sandinista leadership. Sergio Ramirez, a recent convert to the FSLN, the Marxist intellectual Daniel Ortega Saavedra, and Moises Hassan. The United States did not approve of the Marxist majority on the new junta and William Bowdler was dispatched to try and persuade the FSLN to broaden the base of the junta. Even such North American liberals as Edward Kennedy were calling for 'any measure to prevent the installation of a Marxist regime in Nicaragua.'[28] But the response was that by including the MDN leader and a prominent conservative, the Sandinistas had already bent over backward to create a representative body. They pointed out that the persons suggested by the US, Adolfo Calero, Gen.Julio Guiterrez of the Guardia, Emilio Alvarez (Conservative), Ernesto Fernendez (a Liberal friend of Somoza), Mariana Fiallos, another Liberal, and Conservative Jaime Chamorro of La Prensa -- would give the older order a dominant voice and be simply 'Somocismo without Somoza'.

While Bowdler tried to bargain with the Sandinistas, Pezzullo was intent on effecting Somoza's departure. In this he had a firm ally in Archbishop Obando, who was doing everything possible to discredit the regime and persuade the Americans to accept the inevitable FSLN victory. So active was the archbishop that Somoza was rumoured to have made a vow that if he were forced to flee, his last act could be to shoot 'Commandante Miguelito., as he styled the archibishop.[29]

28 Richard Millet, n.14, p.241.
29 Thomas P.Anderson, n.4, p.162.

In the end, however, Pezzullo's 'jawboning' had the desired effect and a new assault on the capital was avoided.

On the night of Monday, 16 July 1979, Somoza agreed to go into exile in Florida with his entire entourage, including his mistress Dinora Sampson. He would leave behind, as interim president, Francisco Urcuyo, the president of the lower house, to turn over power to the victorious Sandinistas. He then drove to the airport early in the morning of Tuesday, 17 July and left Nicaragua forever.

For days before his actual departure, the handwriting had been on the wall. Bands of demoralised Guardia roamed the streets of the capital, mostly very young boys and old reservists, shooting at random and terrorising the populace. At the Inter-Continental, where members of the Congress were kept, distraught women wept, men held futile political discussions and street urchins wandared about selling bottles of pilfered wine and spirits in a scene reminiscent of the fall of Saigon.[30] Plainly, a whole world was ending.

To add the ultimate touch to the confusion just after Somoza's departure, Urcuyo had the strange notion that he could manage to stay on until the expiry of Somoza's term in 1981. It is quite possible that Somoza himself, as a last malicious gesture, had inspired this, but no sooner was it communicated to Pezzullo than a furious flurry of messages rushed back and forth between Managua and Washington. Having failed to convince the Sandinistas, to broaden the junta, the United States had at last decided to cut its losses and go along with the inevitable triumph of the FSLN.

30 Ibid., p.163.

Urcuyo's announcement threw everything out of joint. From Washington, a high official of the State Department was said to have put through a call to Somoza in Florida, warning him that if Urcuyo stayed on, he would be immediately deported. Reluctantly, perhaps, Somoza sent out the necessary word, and the new president resigned, having been 'king for 36 hours', as was said on Salvadorean radio.[31] And as he left on the nineteenth, the Sandinista government arrived.

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31 Ibid.

Chapter IV

SUPER POWER INVOLVEMENT : CONSTRAINTS AND SUCCESSES

US influence in Nicaragua has been strong and pervasive since time immemorial. But this needs to be examined in the light of certain principles of US foreign policy formulated before and during the age of Latin American independence. With the breakup of the Spanish colonial empire, the US had, for the first, time to evolve a policy towards its neighbours, which took account of the fact that they too were becoming independent. In the Monroe Doctrine formulated in 1823, the principle of reciprocity was maintained; it was understood at the outset by the newly enfranchised Latin American States as a defensive movement in their favour rather than a step taken by the US in its own interest and for its own self-defense.[1]

The US under the provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, would not interfere with existing colonies, just as it would not interfere in the affairs of Europe itself. It would, however, oppose the reconquest by European powers of territories seeking to assert their independence, and even more, any transfer of colonies in the New World between European powers. This latter provision owed much of its impetus to a contestable, "alarm caused by reports that Russian sailors were moving southwards from Alaska along the coast of Upper California and hence might herald an attempt to annex this region before the independence of Mexico could be consolidated."[2]

1 This reciprocity envisaged the need not to interfere in the affairs of Europe, if the US itself was to be left alone.

2 Peter Calvert, "The Future US role in Latin America", International Journal, Toronto, 1981-82, XXXVII(1), p.77.

In the Monroe Doctrine as it came to be regarded later both in the USA and in Latin America, future generations came to interpret the words written by John Quincy Adams both as an assertion of a tutelary role for the US over the emerging Latin American states and as an obligation upon these states to accept it. The latter delusion -- product of the heady rush to power of USA at the end of the 19th century -- was recognised as such at the end of the 1920s and publicly renounced by President F.D.Roosevelt's statement of the Good Neighbour policy. In the meanwhile, however, it had played its part in creating the paradox that the US, from its origin and by predilection a strongly anti-imperialist power, had itself acquired a small but noticeable empire.[3]

By 1927, US Under Secterary of State, Robert Olds declared, as a principle established by the Monroe Doctrine and reinforced through 'logic' and 'long-practice' that Central America was a legitimate sphere of influence of the USA. He stated that "Central America has always understood that governments we recognise and support stay in power, while those which we do not... fall. Nicaragua has become a test case..."[4]

In 1927 itself with US Marines occupying Nicaragua, Walter Lippmann, a foreign policy analyst, remarked that "all the world thinks of the US today as an empire, except the people of the United States... To admit that we have an empire still seems to most Americans like admitting that they have gone out into a wicked world and there lost their

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3 Ibid.

4 Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin (edited), Central American Crisis Reader (New York : Summit Books, 1987), p. 27.

their political chastity". The United States of America emerged from an anti-colonial struggle for 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' -- what are now referred to as 'human rights'. Yet as the USA grew into a great industrial and military power, it acquired what the rest of the world, and definitely Latin Americans, regard as an empire.[5]

In fact, throughout most of the twentieth century, the United States exercised unchallenged hegemony in the region and monopolised foreign intervention. The route to dominance was nearly always smoothed by US illusions of assisting 'free elections', democracy, and the formation of 'non-partisan' armies. However, for Central America, the results were usually military dictatorships.[6]

In the 1920s, on behalf of 'free elections' and against a supposed 'Bolshevik threat' emanating from revolutionary Mexico, the United States created in Nicaragua a 'nonpartisan professional army' (the National Guard) and led it into battle against the Mexico-backed guerrillas of August Sandino.[7] The United States furnished military equipment, combat officers, and trainers as well as roads, medical care, and the inevitable electrol apparatus, and helped establish Somoza's dictatorship. In F.D. Roosevelt's own

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5 The American expansion to the Pacific Coast was achieved through land grants as also by force. In general, however, economic, political and financial rather than military coercion was preferred. The apparent invisibility of these methods, the American anticolonial heritage and the relative openness of their political process made it both suitable and necessary to present the American acquisitions as something other than empire. See Robert S.Leiken and Barry Rubin, n.4, p.27.

6 For an excellent history of early US-Nicaraguan relations, See Richard Millett, Guardians of the Dynasty, (New York : Orbis, 1977).

7 Robert S.Leiken and Barry Rubin, n.4, p.28.

words, Somoza was 'our son of a bitch.'[8] Two generations of Nicaraguans thus came to draw the conclusion that America's talk of democracy and posture of innocence abroad was little more than a Trojan horse for hegemony.

For the State Department, these efforts were part of the struggle of "democracy vs barbarism", as Olds put it. "The mission of civilising the savage was deeply rooted in our history". It was a tradition that ignored social and historical conditions of the "barbarians". As Octavio Paz writes, 'when the US abandons its isolation and participates in the affairs of the world, it does so in the manner of a believer in a land of infidels.'[9]

American military interference and political engineering left a legacy of distrust and anti-Americanism. The consequences have been twofold: an increasing desire on the part of Latin American countries to establish foreign policy agendas separate and even opposed to that of the United States; and a susceptibility in certain sectors of Latin America to Soviet influence under the initial assumption that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.[10] The emergence of the four-nation Contadora Group (Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela) and the Lima Support Group (Peru, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay), which has sought a regional settlement for the Central American conflict, is a manifestation of the first tendency. The pro-Soviet proclivities of the Sandinistas are an example of the second.

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8 Though the phrase was commonly associated with Somoza, the epithet originally referred to Rafael Trujillo, the military ruler of the Dominican Republic from 1930-1961.

9 Octavio Paz, One Earth, Four or Five Worlds, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Johanovich, 1985), p.50.

10 Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin, n.4, p.29.

Today, the Soviet Union and its Cuban allies have gained a foothold in Latin America and seek to spread their influence via Nicaragua. At the same time the US feels that it has legitimate national security concerns in the region, interests which have allegedly been put in jeopardy by Soviet/Cuban hegemonic ambitions.

The US foreign policy approach towards Central America derives primarily from a perception of the geo-strategic importance of the region. Traditional views of American strategic interests in Central America emphasise on an inventory of national security, economic and geo-political interests. Protection of these vital interests has been justification for US intervention in the domestic affairs of countries located within the region on more than one occasion. Indeed, the current phase of US interventionism, in which Central America has become a major theatre of East-West tensions, is justified by recourse to traditional articulation of US strategic interests.[11]

Addressing the Sub-Committee of Inter-American Affairs of the House of Representatives, M.Peter McPhereson, Administrator of the Agency for International Development reiterated these views: The geographic proximity of Latin America and the Caribbean has a direct bearing on our national security. Our vital concerns in the region include unimpeded use of the sea lanes adjacent to North America and the Panama Canal, and continued access to oil from Venezuela, Mexico and other exporters in the hemisphere.[12]

11 Robert Henriques Girling and Luin Goldring, 'US Strategic Interests in Central America: The Economics and Geo-politics of Empire', in the Stanford Central America Action Network (edited), Revolution in Central America, (Colorado: Westview, 1983), p.187.

12 M.Peter McPhereson, Testimony before Committee on Foreign Affairs, Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs, House of Representatives, December 15, 1981.

Moreover, McPhereson cited the economic significance of the Latin American region in purchasing "nearly $ 39 billion of US exports, making them the second largest market for our products, topped only by Western Europe". He went on to say that "Seventy percent of all US foreign direct and financial investment in the developing world is in Latin America and the Carribbean... We depend on the region for significant shares of several important raw materials and other commodities such as bauxite and alumina, coffee, sugar and petroleum." Central America is thus seen as vital to the integrity of the entire Caribbean Basin which stretches from the island economies of the Caribbean through Mexico to Venezuela and Colombia.

Strategic interests include security interests in the region, the strategic military corridor through which one-half of US oil imports pass and the economic mineral resources -- petroleum, aluminium and nickel -- that are situated in the region; resources which generate four dollars for every one dollar of invested capital.[13] To protect these assets, the traditional views of US interests have stressed one over-riding concern -- innoculation of the region against any regime potentially hostile to the US or US business interests.

An alternative view of US interests in the region, however, questions the security and economic value of the region. US security interests were seriously questioned by Abraham Lowenthal, Director of the Latin American Programme at the Woodrow Wilson Centre in Washington, D.C. in 1981. He said:

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13 Robert Henrigues Girling and Luin Goldring, n.11, p. 187.

> "If we are really honest about the situation and think about the contingencies in which the use of US military force might be a possibility in the Western Hemesphere, they would not be to protect against threats to vital US security assets, (but) rather to shore up beleaguered regimes, such as we see now in Central America... As (to) strategic and other materials, Latin America's relative importance as a source for the US has dropped for most products as the country's international links have multiplied, and as synthetics have increasingly come to be used... the US no longer depends on Latin America for any commodity, as it does on South Africa and the Soviet Union for chrome and platinium."[14]

Moreover, the direct economic significance of Latin America and the Caribbean has been declining in terms of direct foreign investment and political support.[15] There are, however, some assets of considerable value to the US located in Central America. The Panama Canal is a vital commercial and military link to Latin America and Europe. Strategic analysts argue that any adverse course of events in the region could have deterimental consequences upon these vital assets.

Nicaragua, like Cuba, was victimised early in the century by the new 'Manifest Destiny' which guided US hemispheric policy during those years. It became a virtual protectorate of the United States in 1912 when the Marines were dispatched, ostensibly to protect American property and citizens during a period of civil strife.

But the USA soon enough, turned Nicaragua into its fief, exercising direct control of its customs, railways

14 Abraham Lowenthal testimony, US National Interest in Latin America, Hearing before Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs, March 1981.

15 Robert H. Girling and Luin Goldring, n.11, p.188.

and the National Bank, while the country's mines, plantation and forest resources were owned by American companies. The government, the military barracks and all communications were under the control of the US Marines. As if this were not enough, in return for three million dollars, Nicaragua was forced to sign the Bryan-Chamarro Treaty on August 5, 1914, under which Nicaragua granted the US, in perpetuity and free of any payment, the right to exclusive title necessary for the contruction, operation and maintenance of a canal along the Rio San Juan-Great Lake line, or along any other line on Nicaraguan territory. The Treaty also stipulated that in order to facilitate the defence of the Panama Canal by the United States government and for the purpose of implementing the rights agreed upon, as well as of facilitating any measure essential for the realisation of the envisaged objectives, Nicaragua lease to the United States, for a period of ninety-nine years, the Great Corn and Little Corn Islands in the Caribbean Sea, and recognised also for the same period, the right of the US to build and mantain a naval base on that part of Nicaraguan territory lying on Fonseca Bay, which the US government would choose.[16]

In fact, US interest in Nicaragua, like most of Central America, was primarily strategic. Considered for a time as a possible site for a canal across the isthmus, Nicaragua's location remained strategically important for defence of the canal in Panama. American control over the customs houses of Nicaragua was established less to insure the loans of US bankers than those of Europeans, whose

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16 Angelo Colleoni, US Interventions - A Brief History (New Delhi : Sterling, 1984), p.103. Also see Thomas L. Karnes, 'The Historical Legacy and the Failure of Union' in Howard J.Wiarda (edited), Rift and Revolution (Washington: American Enterprise Institute of Public Policy Research, 1984), p.42.

potential for interventions the US perceived as a strategic threat.[17]

The Panama Canal is the sine qua non in the realm of Caribbean geo-politics. Each year some 12 % of US-seaborne commerce traverses the isthmus. The cargo includes a third of corn and phosphate exports, approximately one quarter of US coal exports, and 15 % of grain exports.[18] Militarily, the canal is considered to be essential to the defence of Europe in the event of a prolonged war. The importance of the Canal to the US as a military training site cannot also be discounted. Nevertheless despite these facts, the economic importance of the Canal is said to be on the wane since the 1960s. "Built in 1914, the present canal can accommodate ships of upto 56,000 dead weight tons. It is now more economical to use larger ships upto 250,000 dwt -- even if it means going round Cape Horn, according to the international shipping industry."[19] US foreign policy formulators, however, still believe that the entire Central American region is important to the defence of Mexico and Brazil; it is strategically important due to its symbolic value, in showing the world 'that the US has stopped abandoning even its pockmarked friends.'[20]

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17 William M. Leo Grande, 'The Revolution in Nicaragua. Another Cuba?', Foreign Affairs, Fall, 1979, and also see Margaret Daley Hayes, 'US Security Interests in Central America, in M.D. Hayes (edited). Central America : International Dimensions of the Crisis, (New York : Holmes and Meir, 1982).

18 US Congress House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, US Interests in the Panama Canal Hearings, 95-1, July 25-27, 1977, p.711.

19 'A New Way Around the Old Canal', World Business Weekly, October 5, 1981, p.8

20 W. Scott Thompson, 'Choosing to Win', Foreign Policy, Summer,1981, p.83.

Except for a brief interlude in 1925-26, US troops remained in Nicaragua until 1933. The second occupation never really managed to pacify Nicaragua. August Sandino refused to accept the imposition of a Conservative president in the country and for nearly six years he fought a guerrilla war against the Marines, achieving international stature as a nationalist and anti-imperialist. When the US withdrew under the banner of F.D.Roosevelt's Good Neighbourism, it left the task of ensuring stability to the American-trained National Guard under the command of Anastasio Somoza Garcia.[21] One of Somoza's first achievements was to lure the legendary Sandino to Managua on the pretext of arranging peace, only to have him assassinated. In 1936, Somoza forced the civilian president from office, arranged his own election and thus began a family dynasty which ruled Nicaragua for 43 years.

The Somozas carefully cultivated the friendship of the United States. This was accomplished through personal as well as political means. On the personal plane, all of the Somozas were educated in the US, spoke fluent English, could turn on US mannerisms at will and were skilled at manipulating Americans.[22] At the same time, in the realm of international politics, the Somozas were always obsequiously 'pro-American'. The enemies of the US were automatically their enemies, be they the Axis powers during World War II, or the Communists thereafter. Accordingly, Nicagaruan territory was used by the United States for military bases during World War II and for the training of CIA surrogate

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21 Richard Millett, n.6, p.251.

22 T.W. Walker (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution (New York : Praeger, 1982), p.16.

forces for Guatemala (1954) and Cuba (1961).[23] Nicaraguan troops joined the US forces in the occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and were offered, but politely refused, during the Korean and Vietnam 'conflicts'. In return, the USA sent ambassadors to Managua who were usually enthusiastically friendly to the Somozas. In addition, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, US foreign aid -- economic, 'social' and military -- poured into Nicaragua, and more members of Somoza's National Guard received training in the US or at US bases in Panama than was true of any other Latin American military establishment.[24]

The United States involvement in Nicaragua, over and above helping Somoza remain at the helm, extended to financial investment in the country. US firms like Alberti Foods, Booth Fisheries, Hughes Tool Company and the Banco de America picked up the crumbs left by the rapacious Somozas.[25] The US had come to stay as an ally of Nicaragua; though the Somoza dynasty was far from the civilian democracy originally envisioned by the United States; it was nonetheless stable, pro-American and anti-communist.

The 1970s however, brought about a qualitative change in Somoza's approach to running the country. The extent of corruption, together with the expansion of Somoza's economic empire into areas of economic activity previously reserved for other members of Nicaragua's bourgeoisie, alienated large sectors of both the middle and upper classes who had traditionally been atleast the passive accomplices of

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23 Ibid., p.17.

24 Richard Millett, n.6, p.252.

25 Thomas P.Anderson, Politics in Central America, (New York : Praeger, 1982), p. 154.

the dynasty.[26] The 1972 earthquake that destroyed the capital city of Managua also stimulated opposition to Somoza's economic and political empire, manifested in the wave of strikes, demonstrations and land seizures that swept the country during that period. Somoza responded to the growing opposition with political repression. The reign of terror visited upon Nicaragua by the National Guard in 1975 and 1976 appalled Nicaragua's moderates and earned the Somoza Government international opprobrium. It also made Somoza the chief nemesis of human rights advocates in the US Congress.[27]

The long history of Somoza's ties to the US and his willingness to cooperate with US policy objectives in the hemisphere suggested that Nicaragua might prove especially malleable to US influence. Thus, when the Carter Administration unveiled its new human rights policy in 1977, Nicaragua became its principal target, constituting a near perfect show case for the policy. The absence of any apparent security problem in Nicaragua meant that the US policy there, unlike policy towards Iran or South Korea, could be safely guided by the moral imperative of human rights undiluted by national and security concerns. Reduction in US military assistance to Nicaragua on human rights grounds emboldened Somoza's moderate opponents, who had historically been immobilised by the unflagging US support which the dynasty had enjoyed.

The subsequent days saw the entire Nicaraguan nation

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26 William M. Leo Grande, 'The United States and the Nicaraguan Revolution', in T.W. Walker, (edited), Nicaragua in Revolution, (New York : Praeger, 1982), p.63

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

erupting in a paroxysm of violence.[29] And as civil violence became more endemic, US policy was caught in the pull of opposing imperatives. Should the US stand by its advocacy of human rights and democratic reform in the face of Somoza's deteriorating political position? Or should human rights be subordinated to the political stability long provided by a brutal but reliable ally? Complicating this choice was the Carter Administration's self-imposed prohibition on interventionism in the Hemisphere and uncertainty as to whether Somoza could, in fact, restore order. To some extent, differing evaluations of the situation tended to be bureaucratically based. The ability of the Administration to devise a coherent policy was further diminished by the potent 'Nicaraguan lobby' in Congress, and its willingness to hold unrelated legislation hostage to the Administration's actions. This interplay of forces resulted in a policy which was more a product of bureaucratic compromise than of a clear assessment of US interests. In fact, there was hardly any policy at all.[30]

In April 1977, the US restricted both military and economic aid to Somoza on human rights grounds; in September, the restrictions were relaxed. The government's harsh repression of the January 1978 riots sparked by Chamorro's assassination prompted the Americans to impose new restrictions and seek to start a 'dialogue' between Somoza and the moderate group among the opposition. Six months later, On June 30, 1978, President Carter sent a letter to Somoza

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29 For a detailed narration of the events leading to the revolution, read Philip Wheaton and Yvonne Dilling, Nicaragua : A People's Revolution, (Washington D.C., EPICA Task Force, 1980).

30 William M. Leo Grande, n.17, p. 33.

congratulating him on his improved human rights record.[31]

The last action on part of Carter led a majority of Nicaraguan opposition to conclude that their strategy of forcing Somoza's resignation with the help of US pressure was untenable. Subsequently a broad coalition consisting of both radical and moderate groups of the opposition was formed with the aim of wresting power out of Somoza's hands.[32]

The seizure of the National Palace in August 1978 by the FSLN, followed by a general strike and attacks on the National Guard captured the popular imagination. Soon, these guerrilla actions sparked mass insurrection in Matagalpa, Leon Esteli, Chinandega and Grenada -- Somoza retaliated by launching an aerial bombing of cities, and summary executions. Thus, after September 1978, things reached such a pass that no compromise that would retain Somoza in power appeared possible.

The spectacle of an army waging war against its own people and the conviction that Somoza would never be able to restore political stability in the country prompted the US officials to think in terms of a re-evaluation of its policy. Moreover, the FSLNs unexpected strength and support raised the spectre of an eventual Sandinista victory unless some sort of a 'political solution' could ensure a successful replacement of Somoza with a moderate government. From the fall of 1978 onwards, the single goal of US policy was to prevent the succession of an FSLN-dominated government. Under

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31 William M. Leo Grande, n.26, p. 67. And also see, for the letter, Shirley Christian, Nicaragua : Revolution in the Family (New York : Random House, 1985, p. 67.

32 It was called the Frente Amplio Oposition - FAO.

the auspices of the Organisation of American States (OAS), the US organised a mediation effort aimed at creating an 'interim government' composed of the FAO and Somoza's National Liberal Party; The National Guard would remain intact. The plan envisaged no role for the FSLN, and the guerrillas denounced it as Somocismo without Somoza.[33]

When Somoza rejected the mediation proposals, the US -- which maintained that the collapse of mediation would affect the 'whole range' of its relations with Nicaragua -- retailiated, but the retaliation was largely symbolic. The four-man military mission was withdrawn, and the embassy staff was cut by half. At the same time, however, Representatives Charles Wilson (Democrat, Texas) and John Murphy (Democrat, New York) threatened to torpedo the Panama Canal treaties' implementation legislation if the Administration moved openly against Somoza.[34]

The June 1979 'final offensive' of the FSLN and the immediate success it achieved in the countryside served to heighten US fears of an FSLN victory and ensured a retreat from the 'non-interventionist' low profile which characterised US policy after the failure of mediation efforts. Addressing the OAS on June 22, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance finally put the US on record as favouring Somoza's resignation. The rest of his proposals, however, did not correspond to the realities in both Nicaragua and the OAS.[35]

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33 William M. Leo Grande, n.26, p. 67.

34 William M. Leo Grande, n.17, p. 35. And also see Shirley Christian, n.31, p.121.

35 Vance Spoke of a "broad-based representative government" and an OAS peace-keeping force to ensure a ceasefure. Ibid.

With an FSLN victory in sight, the US began to seek to construct a constitutionalist solution. Somoza would resign in favour of a constitutionalist successor who would then appoint a council of prominent independent Nicaraguans and turn power over to them. The Council would mediate between Somoza's Liberal Party, the National Guard and the opposition to create an interim government composed of all these forces. The government, with the National Guard still intact, would then make preparations for elections in 1981.[36] Needless to say, the constitutionalist plan collapsed, with the US realising that none of Nicaragua's moderates would endorse or participate in it.

When the accession of an FSLN-backed provisional government became inevitable, the US strove to negotiate the terms of transition in order to minimise FSLN influence. It decided to use two levers in this context: Somoza would resign at the US direction and the US would provide massive economic aid to a government acceptable to it. In return it wanted the induction of two more moderates to the Provisional Government for National Reconstruction, formed earlier in June, and a guarantee that neither Somoza's Liberal Party nor the National Guard would be dismantled.[37]

The FSLN was not disposed to accede to these demands despite pressure from several Latin American countries which had earlier aided the anti-Somoza opposition. All it agreed to was guarantee the lives of Somocistas and National Guardsmen, and leave open the possibility for 'honest' members

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36 William M. Leo Grande, n.17, p.36. T.W.Walker points out that the Carter Administration, in the final hours of the Somoza regime, tried to bargain, without success, with the revolutionaries for the maintenance of the National Guard, in a "revised" form after Somoza's departure. See T.W. Walker, Nicaragua, The Land of Sandino, (Colorado : Westview, 1981), p.40.

37 Ibid.

of the Guard to join the new national army. The battlefield situation, plus the moderation of the provisional goveenment programme and cabinet, finally left the US with no option but to accept the junta's terms.

On July 17, President Anastasio Somoza Debayle went into exile in Miami. With him went the entire senior command of the National Guard, as well as its morale. The Guard proceeded to disintegrate ignominously, and within 24 hours had ceased to exist. Thus was realised the very eventuality which US policy since January 1978 had sought to avoid -- a complete Sandinista military victory.

The failure of American policy cannot be attributed to the lack of a clear policy objective -- at least not after Chamorro's assessination; nor can it be attributed to the internal dynamics of Nicaraguan politics. As William M. Leo Grande puts it:

> "As events unfolded in Nicaragua, the US consistently tried to fit a square peg of policy into the round hole of reality. By failing to assess accurately the dynamics of Somoza's decline, the US produced proposals which were invariably six months out of date. When the political initiative lay with the moderate opposition, the US acted as if it still lay with Somoza. When the initiative shifted to the radicals, the US acted as if it lay with the moderates. And when, at the last moment, the US recognised that the radicals held the initiative, it seemed to think it could cajole them into returning it to the moderates."38

In short, this failure was the result of the selective perception of policy makers who seemed to believe that Somoza

38 Ibid., p.37.

could restore order long after that became impossible, that the moderates were strong enough to form a post-Somoza regime excluding the radicals, and finally, that the radicals could be induced to surrender their leadership of the opposition on the very threshhold of victory.

THE ROLE OF THE SOVIET UNION

The crisis of the US-backed Central American status quo offered Moscow an inexpensive opportunity to confound its superpower rival. Earlier on, Moscow had virtually consigned Central America to the US sphere of influence by geographic fatalism. When this region, like other 'back-yards' of the world, was swept into the vortex of revolution; Soviet interest quickened. Yet, precisely because this is a US zone of influence, Moscow's capacity to project power appeared limited. These opportunities and limitations form the parameters within which Moscow has had to operate.

In the fourteen years between 1965 and 1979, the Soviet Union had managed to achieve rough nuclear parity with the US, while widening its conventional advantages. Moscow's development of a blue-water navy and the rapid strides it made in the sphere of logistics made it possible to form a more effective 'natural alliance' with many Third World national liberation movements, particularly in the light of US repudiation of intervention.

The same period witnessed major changes in Soviet tactics. Moscow made it clear that economic ties with the Soviet bloc were no longer to be considered as the main factor for the 'non-capitalist road of development'. It was

asserted that 'political military fronts' modelled on Fidel Castro's July 26th Movement could play the role previously reserved for vanguard Marxist-Leninist parties. In other words, in the mid-1970s the main element emphasised was the 'political, military, strategic, and moral influence of the states of the Socialist community', which translated into growing Soviet military and security assistance to revolutionary movements and 'national revolutionary governments'.[39]

This shift was a reflection of the widening gap between Soviet economic and military performance. Accordingly, in dealing with countries like Angola, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Nicaragua, Moscow recommended the preservation of mixed economies and economic ties with the West. At the same time, the Kremlin sought over-whelming influence in the military, security and intelligence spheres.

Three factors which are understood to have influenced the modification of Soviet policy toward Central America in the 1970s were: the favourable 'global correlation of forces', proven success for the new strategy, and a helpful Cuba. It needs to be mentioned, however, that such a shift would not have taken place without the existence of compatible conditions in Central America.[40]

In other words, by the 1970s, the Soviet Union and Cuba had arrived at a coherent strategic vision with regard to the Third World in general and the Caribbean basin in particular, according to which their actions have been orchestrated. After almost a decade of discord, there was now an integrated, though flexible, and long term plan of

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39 Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin, n.4, p.31.
40 Ibid.

action aimed at achieving specific ideological, political, security and economic objectives.[41]

Ideology: It would be misleading to assume that Soviets support revolutionary movement in the Caribbean basin solely as part of a grand design to create Leninist regimes.[42] Still ideology cannot be discounted as one of their greater motives. The Soviet Union, after Cuba began to conform to true Leninist development, desired that this revolution be emulated by other radical regimes in the region. Thus the Leninist inclination of the FSLN regime in Nicaragua could not but be appreciated and applauded by the Soviets, particularly when it became better able to justify to domestic constituencies and allied Communist countries the aid extended to this regime.

Politics: The Soviets' most important political objective in the basin is to ferment and further forces and regimes which they consider progressive. Because the Soviets view the regime as the strategic rear or internal security zone of the US, their policy has been cautious, until recently respecting in action, if not in word, the Monroe Doctrine. This attitude changed in 1960 when Khrushchev stated that "the Monroe Doctrine has outlived its times" and that US acceptance of the Cuban Revolution was proof that it had died a "natural death".[43] Still, because of certain

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41 For a more detailed discussion of the formulation of Soviet-Cuban strategy, see Jiri Valenta, "The USSR, Cuba, and the Crisis in Central America", Orbis, 25(3), 1981, pp.715-46.

42 Jiri and Virginia Valenta, "Soviet Strategy and Policies in the Caribbean Basin" in Howard J.Wiarda (edited), Rift and Revolution, (Washington: American Enterprise Institute of Public Policy Research, 1984), p.204.

43 TASS (Moscow), July 12,1960. For an elaboration of Soviet strategy, see M.F.Kudachin, The Great October and Communist Parties of Latin America (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1978).

constraints, Soviet strategy in the Caribbean during the past two decades has continued to be refined and subtle, allowing for revolutionary transformation by primarily peaceful means.[44] The choice of means is dictated by internal, national conditions, which vary from country to country, and by a number of external variables, the most important among them being the state of Soviet-American relations.

Soviet tactics in the area have vacillated from avidly pursuing peaceful diplomatic channels -- vis-a-vis the late Omar Torrijos' military yet "progressive" Panamanian regime and the likewise "progressive" regime of Michael Manley in Jamaica, for instance -- to an emphasis on guarded but militant aspects of the revolutionary struggle -- as in Nicaragua and Grenada. The Soviets also courted some liberal democratic regimes such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia and Venezuela regimes while widening popular support for the radical leftist groups working in those countries.[45]

Security: One other important component of overall Soviet strategic vision regarding Central America and the Caribbean is oriented to security matters. The primary Soviet security objective is to gradually secure access to and maintain naval facilities in the Caribbean basin so as to improve the projection of Soviet power while undermining that of the US and its allies. A substantial Soviet military presence in the region would endanger logistic support for

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44 Refer to the Parliamentary road to socialism - a prolonged political process during which anti-American forces build national coalitions to challenge US hegemony.

45 Jiri and Virginia Valenta, n.42, p.206.

US allies in Europe and the delivery of oil and other strategic materials to the US. During wartime, Cuba, though vulnerable itself, might serve as a forward base for submarines and aircraft carriers.[46]

Economics: Economic objectives play a minor role in Soviet strategy in Central America. Soviet trade investment and credits in early 1982 were limited to Cuba, Mexico, Costa Rica, Grenada and Nicaragua. Since they generally must pay for imports in hard currency, the Soviets probably do not view the Caribbean as a priority interest in strictly economic terms. Thus, in Central America, Soviet trade is low in both absolute and relative terms.[47] The presence of vital natural resources in some countries -- particularly in Mexico, Venezuela and elsewhere -- has however spurred increasing interest in the basin. Soviet and Eastern Bloc trade and economic aid to 'client' regimes such as Nicaragua and Grenada, not to mention Cuba, has consequently encouraged Soviet strategy in the area.

Thus, in 1978, Havana mediated differences among the Sandinista factions and helped achieve a March 1979 reunification, in which pro-Cuban leaders were found to dominate. As the uprising became imminent, Cuba increased direct arms deliveries, organised and armed an 'internationalist brigade' to fight alongside the FSLN guerrillas besides sending military specialists to the field. The spring of 1979 saw Cuban military advisors from the Department of Special

46 According to Soviet Air Force Lieutenant Viktor Belenko, who defected to the West in 1976, the Soviets view the island as their 'aircraft carrier' in the Caribbean. See John Borrow, MIG Pilot, (New York: Readers Digest Press, 1980), p.65

47 Jiri and Virginia Valenta, n.42, p.211.

Operations accompanying FSLN forces into battle while maintaining radio communications with Havana. And after the victory, key military advisory and intelligence positions were awarded to Cubans.

In the wake of the revolution in Nicaragua, both Soviet backed Communist parties in Latin America and Soviet Latin Americanists began to progressively discard Khurushchev's policy of 'peaceful transition to Socialism'; a policy that had been pursued with singular dedication in Latin America earlier on. Moreover, Moscow called upon local Communists to coordinate with the various groups involved in the armed uprising. The tactics of Che Guevara, once referred to as 'ultra left adventurism' by Moscow in the 1960s, were also gradually recognised as effective,, and rehabilitated.

In those Central American countries where the United States has been the backer and the perceived beneficiary of the status quo, anti-Americanism has often translated itself into pro-Sovietism. Nowhere is this more true than in Nicaragua, where the US support for Somoza helps explain the original pro-Soviet bias of many Sandinista commandants. A reading of the founding documents, internal polemics, and private declarations of the FSLN demonstrates the Sandinistas' early ideological leaning and commitment towards Soviet and Cuban style 'socialism'.[48] Reacting against repeated American interventions in Nicaragua, many came to regard Moscow as their 'natural ally' and harboured enormous expectations of Soviet economic and military support. In their view, concrete signs of fidelity were needed to assure such backening. Thus, in August 1979, the

48 Robert S.Leiken and Barry Rubin (edited), n.4, p.32.

Sandinista delegation supported Soviet-Cuban-Vietnamese positions in the Havana meeting of the Non-aligned countries. Later, in the UN in the face of overwhelming Third World condemnation of Russian intervention in Afghanistan, the Nicaraguan delegation abstained.[49]

By mid-1980, the new Sandinista government had signed economic, scientific, technical and cultural accords with the Soviet Union, Cuba, East Germany, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Before President Reagan took office in January 1981, the familiar Soviet bloc division of labour in the Third World was emerging in Nicaragua.[50] The Cubans provided doctors, teachers, construction workers, military specialists, intelligence operatives and advisors to the various government ministries.[51] Soviets concentrated on state security along with Cubans and East Germans; the East Germans also assisted in intelligence and communications; the Bulgarians handled finance, economic planning and construction; and the Czechs provided some military advisors.

Thus after an initial cautious and guarded approach to making commitments to the new regime, the Soviet Union pumped in aid for various agricultural and industrial projects.[52] Soviet deliveries of military equipment to Nicaragua also increased substantially since 1981, reaching

49 Ibid.

50 The evidence is typically partisan and partial, but former Sandinista leaders, defectors, diplomats in Managua, and other sources draw a similar picture.

51 Charles P. Andrain, Political Change in the Third World, (London : Allen and Unwin, 1988), p.132. See "Cuban Support for Central American Guerrilla Groups," CIA Memorandum dated 2.5.79, published in the Congressional Record for May 19, 1980. Also see Shirley Christian, n.31, pp. 159-61.

52 For details, see Jiri and Virginia Valenta, n.42, p.217.

higher levels in 1984 as anti-Sandinista rebels mounted a serious challenge to the government. Moscow, now the world's foremost counterinsurgency power, supplies the overwhelming bulk of assistance to Nicaragua's military and security forces.[53]

Soviet authorities have frequently intimated to US diplomats that the "Nicaraguan problem" can be resolved only in the context of US-Soviet relations. Sandinista eagerness for close ties with Moscow has permitted the Soviet Union to pursue a virtually cost-free policy. Nicaragua could be, and has been a bargaining chip in Moscow's preferred "political settlement" in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, US support for Nicaraguan rebels diverted attention from Afghanistan, and Moscow exploited the intervention for propaganda purposes.[54]

Moscow has been pursuing a wait-and-see, long-term strategy in Nicaragua. By 1986, Managua depended on Moscow for most of its oil and on the Soviet bloc for most of its trade. Kremlin has encouraged the Sandinistas to diversify trading partners and aid donors. The Soviet-bloc presence in the intelligence, security, communications, and military fields has no doubt deepened, but Moscow provides only enough aid to make US military intervention costly and save the Soviet "revolutionary" reputation, not enough to deter a US invasion or risk a superpower confrontation.[55] The tragedy for Nicaragua is that, taken together, Washington's legacy of interference, Moscow's cynicism, and Managua's imprudence have converted that tiny country into the newest arena of superpower contention.

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53 Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin, n.4, p.33.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., pp. 33-34.

CONCLUSION

It is extremely difficult to view the Nicaraguan revolution with anything approaching objectivity. So much depends upon the attitude of the observer towards bourgeois democracy, towards socialism, towards dictatorship, and towards underdeveloped countries. While many visitors to Nicaragua have found the climate of the revolution exhilarating, others have been struck by the drabness of life and the grim puritanism of the revolution's leaders. One therefore faces problems in grasping a situation so new and so fluid.

However, not even the enemies of the Sandinista government could deny that it continued to have, at the beginning of 1981, a broad group of constituencies which could articulate their demands and who were, on the whole, satisfied with the allocation of values determined by the regime.[1] One reason for this support was the burst of national patriotism, helped by an ideology and occasioned by a sanguinary 'civil war' against an unpopular regime, and the ability of the Sandinistas to take upon themselves the mantle of leadership in that struggle. Thus, the war created a disciplined military structure that could be put to partisan ends by the FSLN, and a general good will towards the party. Almost everyone wanted the new regime to succeed, particularly as the US did not seem too pleased with it. This general good

1 Thomas P. Anderson, Politics in Central America (New York: Praeger, 1982), p.186.

will may have faded somewhat, but it was by no means dead in 1981.

The Sandinistas set up, after their victory, a series of interlocking organisations of the masses.[2] Since no rival comprehensive structure existed among the opposition, these organisations played a vital role in maintaining the regime. It was through them that the Government received most of its inputs and feedback on its decisions. They represented a broad and dynamic source of support, and continued to play that role for a good many years.

The government's main programmes, such as land reforms, the literacy campaign, confiscation of Somocista estates and factories, and housing construction, all met with broad popular approval; though other measures, such as control of sugar supply met with grumbling.[3] The government of the FSLN was doing a great deal that was genuinely wanted and which had been necessary for some time. This, too, provided a substantial base of support.

The powerful military establishment, being developed with Cuban and partial Soviet assistance also played its part in providing stability for the regime. The oft-mentioned figure of 50,000 for the regular Sandinista armed forces sounded too high, in a country of less than 2.5 million people.[4] But the growth of military power has indeed been substantial. When the military factor is

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2 Among these were the Sandinista union (CST), the peasant movement (ATC), the youth movement (JS-19), the women's movement (AMNLAE), and most of all, the Sandinista Defence Committee, the CDS.

3 See Shirley Christian, Nicaragua : Revolution in the Family, (New York : Random House, 1986), pp. 286-94.

4 Thomas P. Anderson, Politics in Central America, n.1, p. 187.

added to the aforementioned ones, it becomes plain that the idea that the Sandinista government might magically go away is absurd. Barring a major economic catastrophe there appeared to be sufficient support to keep the FSLN in power for some time.

However, certain groups even from among the proletarian elements felt distinctly unhappy about many of the facets of life in the early eighties. One peasant group profoundly alienated was the ethnic minority living along the Atlantic Coast. These non-Spanish speaking people regarded the government as an alien imposition.[5] The locals also resented foreigners particularly the Cubans, who were attempting to raise their political consciousness. These natives and the Sandinistas thus appeared to have entirely different sets of priorities. While the Sandinistas stood for military security and political control, the natives' priorities were communal rights and religion; things they considered non-negotiable.[6] The non-Sandinista unions were also disgruntled, and this included the 65,000 member CTN, a force to reckon with.[7]

The upper business sector, the very wealthy who had been companions of the Somozas, had largely gone; but the middle business sector represented by COSEP remained. Encouraged by Jose Francisco Cardenal, they had sketched out the bright promise of a 'pluralistic' Nicaragua. But soon their hopes were dashed and, as one of the keenest

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5 Ibid., p.185.

6 For a detailed discussion of the Miskito-Sandinista relationship after the revolution, see Shirley Christian, Nicaragua, n.3, pp. 295-309.

7 Latin America Regional Report, Central America and Mexico, 28 November, 1980.

observers of the post-revolutionary situation confessed, "there is no place for these business men in the scheme of the new Nicaragua." The state of affairs was viewed with some bitterness by the business community. Sergio Ramirez and others said that middle class persons only belatedly supported the revolution, although there were reasons to believe that this was far from the truth. As Alfonso Robelo commented: "We were the anchor of the opposition to Somoza, without which the Sandinistas would not have had victories."[8]

In late 1980 the chief voice of the middle class was the newspaper La Prensa, which could hardly be called a latecomer to the opposition against Somoza; but this voice was saddled with all sorts of restrictions. Decrees 511 and 512 prohibited any discussion of prices and inflation, clashes between government forces and the opposition, strikes and protest movements. According to Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Barrios, during negotiations over banana prices conducted with Standard Fruit Company in San Francisco in December 1980 and January 1981, the press was sent a warning letter telling it not to print anything on the subject, and then another warning, not to print the first warning letter.[9] La Prensa, never without resources, countered by printing on its front page, for several days, a large photograph of a monkey eating a banana, a vivid reminder, to all its readers, of the news which they knew could not be printed. Of the other newspapers, Barricada was busy trying to turn itself into a banana-republic version of the Pravda, while, El Nuevo Diario was

8 Thomas P. Anderson, Politics in Central America, n.1, p. 185.

9 The above mentioned decrees provided for fines and imprisonment for violation by editors.

hardly less sycophantic.[10] That all three were edited by members of the same family was perhaps the ultimate irony.

One important group which enjoyed an ambivalent relationship with the government was the Catholic Church.[11] The Church, like COSEP and La Prensa, had played a very large role in the overthrow of Somoza. Archbishop Miguel Obando Y. Bravo was the very source of the opposition but the other religious orders, particularly the Capuchins, were not far behind. Further, there were, at the end of 1980, no less than four priests holding cabinet-level posts in the government. In the pastoral letter of November 1979, the bishops of Nicaragua had appeared basically favourable to the revolution, and even to socialism, as they understood it. Having proposed several unorthodox definitions of socialism, they had gone on to declare: "If socialism signifies, as it should, the preeminence of the interests of the majority of the Nicaraguan people and a model of national economic planning, solidarity and progressive participation, we have no objections to it."[12] Following the total lack of response to the call by the FSLN for priests to get out of the government since there were qualified lay personnel to replace them, the bishops adopted a harder line. The pastoral letter of October 1980 reflected increasing fears of Marxist dictatorship and denounced the "Materialism" of the Sandinista philosophy. It went on to charge the priests who remained members of the government with a scandalous disregard of the teachings of the Pope, John Paul II -- which could hardly be denied -- and

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10 Thomas P. Anderson, n.1, p.185.

11 For an understanding of the post-1979 church-FSLN relationship, see Shirley Christian, n.3, pp. 236-72.

12 Carta Pastoral de Episcopado Nicaraguense, Managua, 1979, p.8.

warned of the dangers of a totalitarian state.[13] Everyone knew that this represented the thinking of the majority of the bishops, with Ruben Lopez being perhaps the outstanding dissident; and that it represented, above all, the feelings of the powerful archbishop of Managua himself, the man who had done so much to bring down Somoza. With that message, the church had become a formidable antagonist of the state once more.

There were threats from other quarters as well. Although small, radical groups such as the Trotskyites existed, the pressure exerted by them was negligible. There was, however, substantial danger of subversion and military action by forces to the right. These forces were rendered relatively harmless by their disunity and disorganisation. The leader of the exile community Urcuyo Maleno, proclaimed in Guatemala that he had founded a government in exile, but the Guatemalan government forbade him to launch any activities there, under penalty of deportation.[14] The other major contender for leadership of this group, since the death of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, was his son Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, a resident of Miami.[15] The extensive Florida exile community appeared to look to him for leadership, but "El Chiguin" -- the kid, as Tachito was called -- showed little of the drive of his two 'illustrious' ancestors.

More important than ghostly governments in exile were the armed movements. One of these was made up entirely

13 This Week Central America and Panama, 3 November, 1980.

14 Thomas P.Anderson, Politics in Central America, n.1, p.189.

15 Debayle was assassinated in Paraguay on September 17, 1980.

of old Somocistas, chiefly former National Guard members, and was headed by Oscar Armando Larios.[16] Larios's group, the Fuerzas Armadas Democraticas, was powerful, well armed and teamed up with organisations such as the Popular Anti-Communist Militia, consisting of former Somocistas. Then there was an organisation headed by Jose Francisco Cardenal, cousin of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro and who became Vice-President of the Council of State in May 1980, only to leave the country soon after, denouncing the regime as "Communist". His Union Democratica Nicaraguense was composed mostly of disillusioned supporters of the revolution such as Edmundo Chamorro, who made the famous rocket attack on La Loma from the Intercontinental Hotel in 1978, and Commandante Fabian, an ex-FSLN guerrilla leader who operated, with a band, from Honduras.[17] Men of this sort could hardly be dismissed as radical rightists and their opposition had a propaganda effect far beyond their armed strength. The Sandinista government apparently had sufficient strength to weather all the attacks and sabotaging by these groups at the beginning of 1981. The danger was that they might persuade Honduras and Guatemala to launch an attack alongwith them, possibly supported covertly by the United States.[18] While this scenario seemed unlikely, it was regarded with great seriousness in Nicaragua. Another source of potential opposition was formed in July 1981, when the chief of the Militia Popular Sandinista (MPS) -- an adjunct of the regular Sandinista Popular Army -- Eden Pastora, and Vice Minister of the Interior, Jose Valdivia

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16 Armando's brother, now serving a sentence for treason, was the first defence minister of the Sandinista government.

17 This Week Central America and Panama, 26 January, 1981.

18 Thomas P.Anderson, n.1, p.188.

suddenly quit their posts and left Nicaragua. Rumour had it that they had quarrelled with Borge and Humberto Ortega over Cuban and Soviet influence in the country.

In other words, it took few months for the tensions over the future course of Nicaragua to erupt into public discord and end the honeymoon between the FSLN and the great majority of non-Marxists who had remained in the country. Earlier, during a three day period in April 1980, Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Chamorro resigned from the Junta, and La Prensa was closed by an internal dispute over the attitude the newspaper should take towards the policies imposed by the FSLN.[19] The immediate issue for Robelo was the Sandinistas' effort to expand the size of the Council of State then being formed and give themselves a clear majority. Violeta Chamorro diplomatically cited a lame leg as her reason for resigning three days before Robelo, but she had joined him in opposing the expansion and reappointment of the Council of State.[20] For both, the issues went deeper and wider.

Others like Jorge Salazar were in favour of holding elections; he had come to view elections as the pivotal issue in whether Nicaragua would go a totalitarian route or accommodate itself to some form of Western democracy.[21] But Humberto Ortega's speech made on the occasion of the ceremonial

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19 In August 1980, Humberto Ortega announced, that there were to be no campaigning in the press and that neither shortages nor security matters, such as disturbances, could be mentioned in the press. Ibid.

20 Shirley Christian, n.3, p.171.

21 Salazar was a private farm and business leader and president of the Union of Nicaraguan Agricultural Producers (UPANIC).

closing of the Literary Crusade made it clear that there could be no elections until 1985, no political campaigning until 1984, and implying that elections, when they came, would be different from those usually seen in western nations. To Salazar, the FSLN had reneged on its May 1979 promise of holding elections and thus "shown its colours as Marxist-Leninist."[22] He then began to meet various opponents of Sandinista policies who had gradually moved out of the country and spoke in terms of a "fight for the liberation of Nicaragua." The crack was showing. Salazar's killing,allegedly at the hands of Sandinista agents and Tomas Borge's calling him "a traitor plotting to over throw the regime" was the final straw. Not only did this isolate the business community from the FSLN but also hardened lines between the Sandinista Front and the opposition. It also changed the rules of the game -- the conciliatory approach gave way to one of confrontation,of defiance.[23] Those who thought as he did,continued to insist that they had a right to remain in Nicaragua and a right to influence the political and economic future of the country.

The FSLN Government also stirred up trouble for itself by adopting a pro-Soviet line in regard to the world beyond the Americas as well as within. To many 'nationalists' who had fought against Somoza, Yankee imperialism came to be replaced by Soviet and Cuban imperialism -- only that, for them, the latter was worse. Despite FSLN claims to the contrary, the presence of Soviet advisors hardly

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22 Quoted in Shirley Christian, n.3, p. 199.

23 Ibid., p. 214.

changed things for the common man. Besides, there was intense resentment among the deeply religious Nicaraguan people because of anti-Christian tirades of the Cubans.[24]

Elsewhere, the decision of the Nicaraguan representative in the UN to abstain on the Afghanistan issue and the maintaining of relations with Taiwan at the expense of China, lost the Front a number of supporters. This erratic and bellicose nature of Nicaraguan foreign policy projected itself in relations with other countries as well. Not only did tensions with Honduras continue, but Nicaragua managed to alienate many of the countries which had supported the FSLN against Somoza. A dispute with Colombia over the San Andres and Providencia Islands was followed by cooling of relations with Panama.[25] Also the FSLN's decision to help materially and morally the guerrillas fighting the government in El Salvador under its principle of "revolutionary internationalism" not only made 'neutral' governments to stand up and take notice but also finally led the US to review its policy of giving aid to Nicaragua; a step which was to have profound ramifications for the country already steeped in poverty and chaos.[26]

The Sandinista Government thus found itself in the unenviable position of being supported only by the ideologically left group within the country. While some non-Marxists like Omar Cabezas and Violeta Chamorro stayed back, others went into exile, ostensibly to start yet another liberation war. Jorge Salazar had sought to make

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24 See Thomas P. Anderson, n.1, p.178.

25 Ibid.

26 Particularly the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front.

a beginning in this regard but was killed before he could do much. The mantle thus fell on people like Jose Francisco Cardenal, Enrique Bermudez and Edmundo Chamorro. Organisations like ADRIN and UDN -- whose motto was Sin Communismo, Sin Somocismo (without Communism or Somocism) -- began to raise money to arm the exiles.[27] Gradually, guerrilla attacks on FSLN cadres and government posts in the far-flung areas began. In fact, by July 1982, the insurgents were presenting a serious challenge to the Sandinista army and militiamen in the border area and launching small strikes deep into Jinotega. The insurgency had begun.

Thanks to headline writers, the insurgency soon had a special name: La Contra -- short for counter-revolution in Spanish. Though many of the anti-Sandinistas, including Jose Cardenal, denied being counter revolutionaries, the name was adopted almost universally both by the people who supported the Sandinistas and those who hated them. "It was a short handy term reflecting the institutional status that the Contra acquired."[28] Fed by Sandinista policies and American dollars, the Contra could only grow.

Two basic objections were raised to the Contra, even by many Americans and foreign critics of the Sandinistas. One questioned the morality of the decision of the United States to provide funds as also advise a paramilitary force, mine harbours and sanction -- in a Contra training manual -- the assassination of rural Sandinista officials. The second objection held that the Contras accomplished nothing except to contribute to death and destruction, including the killing of non-combatants, and that they gave

27 ADRIN stood for Nicaraguan Democratic Revolutionary Alliance and UDN, for Nicaraguan Democratic Union.

28 Shirley Christian, n.3, p.235.

the Sandinistas reason to institute repressive policies. Had there been no Contras, it is said, the Sandinistas might have had no justification to stock-pile food, to institute the military draft, and to pressurize people to join the militia.

Despite Contra pressure, Daniel Ortega was elected president of Nicaragua on November 4, 1984. For the FSLN, elections meant "we were going to have the legitimacy that the government of the US has been trying to deny us."[29] Nicaraguans voted amidst claims from the Sandinistas that the US was preparing to invade the country. The Sandinistas hoped to deflect the pressure arising out of US cut-off of concessionary wheat sales, troop maneouvres in Honduras and overflights by spy planes. The western press spoke of rigging and other measures intended to cripple the opposition during the elections.[30] But these allegations generally smacked of a pro-American bias and remained uncorroborated.

The nation of which Daniel Ortega became president could hardly feed itself. There were chronic shortages of nearly everything, even the most basic food items normally produced in abundance inside Nicaragua. One of the generally accepted explanations for basic food shortages was the FSLN was stockpiling to feed the military incase of a larger war. This view was substantiated when large quantities of a few basic items suddenly appeared on supermarket shelves just

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29 Sergio Ramirez, quoted in Shirley Christian, n.3, p.346.

30 Among other things mentioned were: The FSLN control over the election machinery, the electoral law in force in 1984 formulated by the FSLN -- majority Council of State and the use of coercion by various Sandinista Committees, particularly the Sandinista Defence Committees. Ibid.

before the elections at decontrolled prices. The FSLN correctly claimed that it had eradicated several diseases in the country with vaccination campaigns but medicines for most illnesses were no longer to be found in the country. The government had stopped paying the interest on most of $ 3.8 million foreign debt, an amount that on a per capita basis put Nicaragua in the company of the most indebted nations of the world. Besides, the oil crisis resulting from the stoppage of supply by Mexico and Venezuela was further aggravated by Contra attacks on the country's only oil port.[31] All this combined put a tremendous pressure on the Sandinista Front.

Around the same time, however, Congressional restrictions were placed on the funding of the Contra by the CIA. In May 1984, the Congress voted to totally cut off CIA financial assistance to the Contra. This development made the Contra leaders scramble to find help from what they said were interested individuals and government-related groups outside the US. Congress, however, stipulated that aid could be resumed only upon enactment of a Joint Resolution of Congress.

In mid-1985, Congress voted to resume aid to the Nicaraguan rebels but limited it to "humanitarian" or non-lethal uses. This meant it could be used to pay for food, medical care, clothing and transport. Washington's decision was apparently influenced by two developments.[32] One, it was impressed by the growth and apparent appeal of the armed opposition; it concluded that the Contra had become a force

31 Ibid., p.351.

32 Ibid., p.368.

that would not just go away, that had to be dealt with as a major phenomenon on the scene. Two, Ortega had offended many members of the Congress by travelling to Moscow just days after Congress voted down lethal aid in April 1985.[33] These reasons were viewed by many even inside America as justifications for a step Reagan had already decided on taking and as a means of covert supply of arms to the Contras.

Among those who debated and analysed US Central American policy, it was often argued that a negotiated settlement was possible between the US and the FSLN. Such a settlement would involve an exchange: The Sandinistas' retention of power in exchange for an end to their assisting of Marxist guerrilla groups elsewhere. However, the likely price to the US for such an agreement was the end of the Contra.[34] That, in turn would have amounted to consolidation of the Sandinista regime internally, and tacit US approval of policies that would never lead to the political pluralism that was the goal of the Americans. And in this, what the Nicaraguan masses felt was relegated to the background. The US maintained -- although it may well be contested -- that this would have been a peace without real solution; one that would leave unresolved most of the outstanding issues.

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33 Congress approved the new aid only after President Reagan made a written commitment to negotiations, towards which many members of Congress hoped that the rebel force might provide leverage on the Sandinistas, and to working for an improved human rights performance by the rebels. Ibid.

34 This was a version of the proposal that the former Assistant Secretary of State, Thomas O.Enders, had put to the FSLN in August 1981. The way the argument went, in early 1986, was that the Sandinistas, after years of guerrilla warfare, might be more inclined to satisfy the security concerns of the US. Thomas P.Anderson, n.1, p. 189.

This matter of internal political pluralism and the extent to which the US should intervene to bring it about is the question US foreign policy formulators have not addressed themselves to. Intervention refers not only to direct military action but also to broader attempts to influence the internal politics of a country through all the methods at the command. Should the US threaten to invade Nicaragua because of its acquiring modern arms or can the US justify intervention or other forms of pressure in the interests of internal change? Even if the tactics in question did not include invasion, could they be justified? Much of the confusion about the goals and function of the Contra was linked to this debate.[35]

In fact, the White House seldom, almost never, cited the internal policies of the FSLN as reason for its support of the Contra. Instead, it invented other reasons for training and financing the Contra.[36] It publicly claimed that Contra forces existed to interrupt arms supplies from Nicaragua to guerrillas in El Salvador; though CIA officials allowed Contra militants to think that they were fighting to rescue their own country.[37] One ethical question about US role in creating the Contra was whether the US should have manipulated people who sought for their country the things the US had initially not encouraged them to seek in opposing Somoza, a chance to test political pluralism as a means of addressing its problems.

35 Shirley Christian, n.3, p.377.

36 Ibid.

37 While the evidence of logistical and advisory connections between the FSLN and the Salvadoran guerrillas was strong, including the presence in Managua of the latter's high command, relatively few actual arms shipments were captured by Honduran or Costa Rican authorities, not the Nicaraguan rebels.

It was thus never fully clear, whether the real purpose of the Contra, in the mind of the Reagan administration, was to bring down the Sandinistas (or force a major structural change in the regime) or simply to put a piece in the gameboard that could be taken off to gain something else, such as concessions on the Salvadoran guerrilla question or the departure of Nicaragua's Soviet bloc advisers.

A proposed Central American peace treaty, known as Contadora for the Panamanian island where the drafting began in January 1983, attempted to deal with all of the Central American issues by committing the signatory nations to internal democratisation as well as reductions in armaments and the departure of foreign military advisors. While initially the FSLN indicated its willingness to sign the first draft of the treaty produced in mid-1984, it later withdrew, saying that the real dispute was between Nicaragua and the US and not among the Central American nations and could thus be resolved on a bilateral basis. The US continued to insist that it would not open bilateral talks with Nicaragua until the Sandinistas opened a "dialogue" with representatives of the armed rebels and other opposition groups.

At the end of 1985, the Contadora effort looked dead, but in early 1986, the four countries that had undertaken to sponsor the treaty drafting, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia and Panama, made an effort to revive it. Both the Sandinistas and the US expressed support. Still, the main sticking point, the argument over political principle, remained. It was not over guns, really, but over politics. The Sandinistas, on the one side, and, on the other, the four other Central American governments, along with the Nicaraguan rebels and the United States held diametrically opposite

views on the kinds of political systems that were desirable.[38]

While there were some differences between and among the four other Central American countries and the US over approaches to the issue, there was general agreement that the major problems of the region were linked to the existence of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. However, not much came out of this attempt at reconciliation and there was an inevitable stalemate.

In the meantime, US policy was inflicting great pain on the Nicaraguan masses. Since 1985, Washington had strangled Nicaraguan trade with an embargo. It had also managed to cut off Nicaragua's credit at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Consequently, real urban wages in Nicaragua fell to about one tenth of what they were before the revolution. Farm workers made as little as 30 cents a day.[39]

The American funding of the Contra and the latter's sabotage of government installations could only add to the misery. The disclosures made about private funding of the Contras through diversion of Iran Arms sales profits in 1986 lent credibility to the belief that the US would leave no stone unturned to ensure Ortega's overthrow.[40]

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38 It came down to a dispute over whether it was possible to find accommodation between those who believed in a basically Leninist government structure and those trying to create, in some cases with great difficulty, basically liberal systems.

39 Newsweek, February 26, 1990, p.34.

40 Washington pursued what has been called an arm's length policy: Wreck the economy and prosecute a long and costly civil war until the exhausted Nicaraguans would overthrow the unwanted government themselves.' See Time, March 12, 1990, p.41.

Nicaragua was in early 1989 forced with a 40 % drop in GNP, an inflation rate running at 1,700 per cent a year (which climbed up to an incrèdible 36,000 per cent in 1988) and constant shortages of food and basic necessities.[41] The Soviet Union had not withdrawn its $ 300 million annual subsidy but the Sandinistas could see that Moscow was retrenching both financially and politically. By February 1989, when Central American leaders under Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez met in El Salvador to discuss a peace plan, the Sandinistas badly needed relief. Ortega quickly persuaded his peers to conclude a dramatic deal: the Contra would be disbanded in exchange for free elections. The first step towards vindication of American policy in Nicaragua had thus been taken.

The victory of the Violeta Chamorro-led and US-funded National Opposition Union (U.N.O.) in the February 1990 elections and the subsequent smooth transfer of power to the new rulers shows portents of a reconsolidation of US influence over Nicaragua. How well they manage it remains to be seen. Already, the dicision of Chamorro to retain Humberto Ortega as chief of the army has caused considerable consternation in the White House. The Contra is to disband by June 1990 but Chamorro has to use all resources at her command to manage what appears to be a tight ropewalk, keeping in mind the factions within the UNO and a powerful, left-oriented military under the influence of the Sandinistas.

The wheel has moved one full circle. The Sandinistas had meant well, in the sense that they sought to carry out,

41 Time, March 12, 1990, p.41. Also see Newsweek, February 26, 1990, p.34.

in a span of a decade, reforms and reconstruction.[42] That they failed to consolidate was the result of the interplay of a number of extraneous forces. Election results cannot however be considered a rejection of anti-imperialist traditions of the Nicaraguans. As Daniel Ortega proclaimed in his post-election speech: "The change of government by no means signifies the end of the revolution."[43] Whether or not the FSLN proves resilient enough to absorb the present shock and grow in strength to be able to present an alternative to Chamorro, time only can tell.

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42 The FSLN's land reforms ensured that thousands of Campesinos (peasants) got land. In 1978, there were 2,000 families which owned 42 per cent of the arable land. After the reforms in 1989 big landlords owned only nine per cent of the arable land; 1,20,000 families benefitted from the handing over of almost 4.9 million acres of land to them. See People's Democracy, New Delhi, March 11, 1990, p.8.

43 Quoted in People' Democracy, New Delhi, March 11, 1990, p.11.

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